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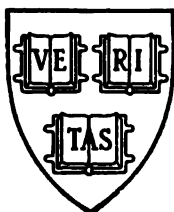


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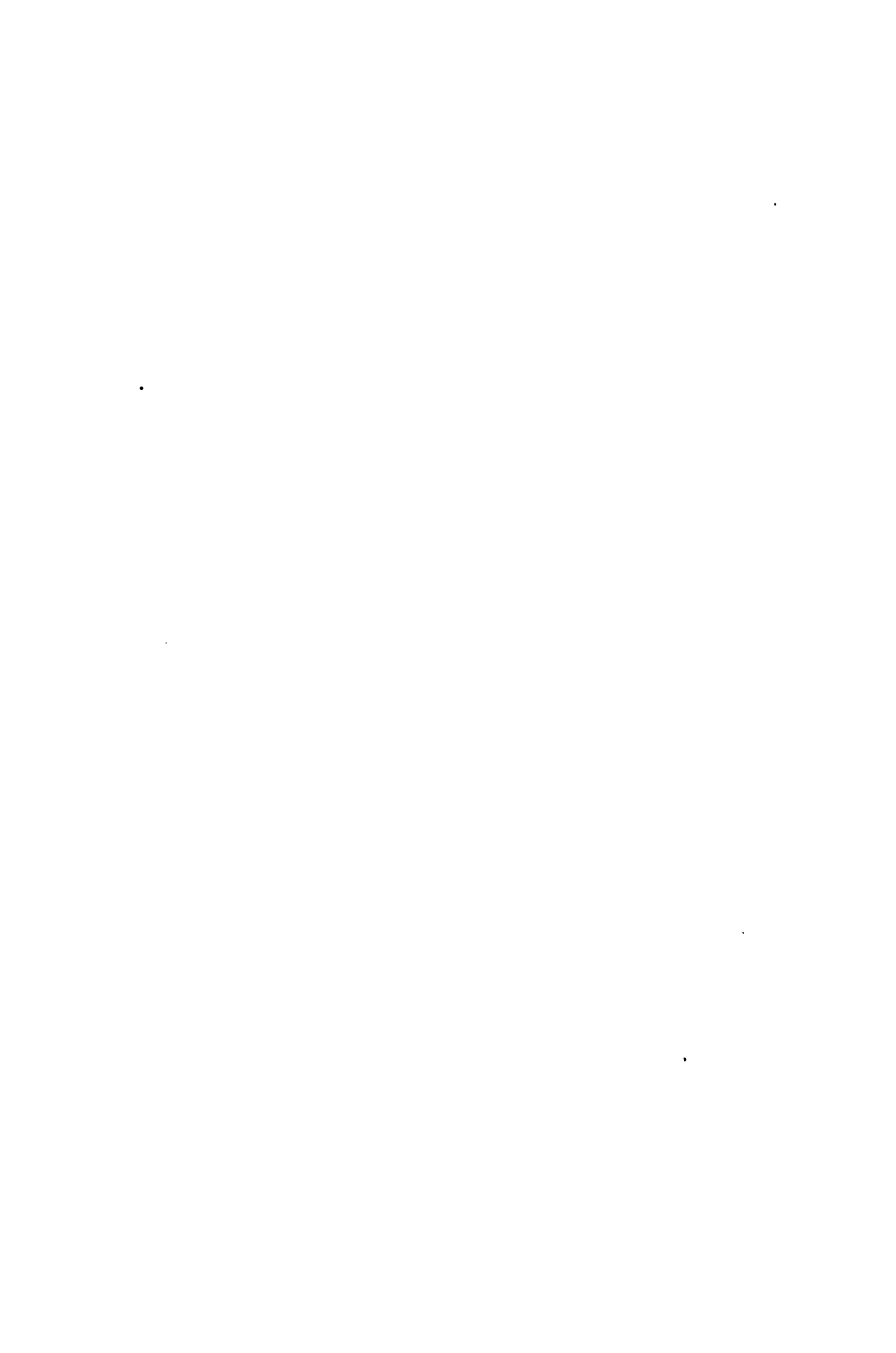
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"It is your unfairness disgusts me!"

(See page 315.)

SOME WOMEN I HAVE KNOWN

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS

AUTHOR OF

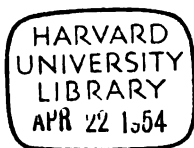
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TO
THE WOMEN WITHOUT A HISTORY
THESE HISTORIES OF WOMEN.

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SOME WOMEN I HAVE KNOWN.

THE DUCHESS ELEANOR.

SHE was a German duchess. In that case, you say, German duchesses being so very few, she must have been either—you are mistaken. She was a Duchess of Lauenstein, of the mediatized house of Stolzenau-Gutelande. She is dead, and nobody who cared for her, except her children, need be sorry it should be so.

They lived at Stolzenau always, the duke and she, in the heart of the famous pine forest, with sand wastes beyond, in flat, dark loneliness, in splendid, gilded pomp. On very rare occasions, when etiquette compelled, they would spend a few days in Berlin—in the gloomy old palace of the Ilsenstrasse—but as soon as he possibly could the duke would return to his pigs and his poultry-yard. The duke was, by preference, a gentleman-farmer: on this expensive and engrossing amusement he wasted an absurdly disproportionate share

of his very considerable income, a still larger share of his far less considerable intelligence, and almost the whole of his nearly illimitable leisure. He was a great, big, fair man, of sickly complexion, with a magnificent mustache and a constant tendency to boils. In his youth he had contracted a strange little habit of sniffing, which at times simply maddened his wife.

The Duchess Eleanor had committed the fatal mistake of accepting a husband she had previously twice refused. She had accepted him because everybody advised her to do so, and also because she had succeeded in convincing herself that, really, to accept him was the wisest and kindest thing she could do. The kindest, especially; it is all very well to say that pity is akin to love; so be it, but pity is quite as closely connected with contempt, which, in some women, kills love for good and all. The Duchess Eleanor would have laughed, or fumed, had any one told her that she had married the duke from pity of his constancy; nor would such a view have been correct, as no woman ever marries for a single reason only, but certainly the fact remains that she had first refused him twice. One refusal surely may be a most charming prelude to acceptance—but two?

Well, they were married and had many

children. Half a dozen children fill the biggest house, but small children are put to bed at early hours, and then come the interminable evenings. Up yonder, by the Baltic, you can seldom sit out after sunset; even in summer you must be content to light your lamps indoors, and reflect that in a week or two you will have to light them earlier.

Duke Ernest hated twilight, being always far too busy to waste the precious moments. He could not converse, he never read; he did accounts, all through the longest evenings, about eggs, and pounds of pork, and cartloads of manure.

It was the evenings, undoubtedly, of which she first noticed the monotonous length. Even that took her several years, during which she realized very little of anything. There could be no more difficult woman to comprehend, had any one taken the trouble to examine her character, than this Duchess of Lauenstein. She was one of those human beings who deliberately undertake to misunderstand their own disposition, and therefore to leave undeveloped or to misdevelop their own natural qualities—or, rather, to allow that these qualities should misdevelop themselves. With that innate timidity which is born of hereditary pride she had set herself from childhood to ignore every natu-

ral impulse or instinct or ebullition of feeling; cherishing that dread of the ridiculous which was ever present before her eyes, checking herself, curbing, keeping back, intimidated by a mother who laughed at her, fretting inwardly under the self-imposed strain. An Austrian by birth, she had partially broken down some of her barriers during a few years of society gaiety in the reserved circle of Vienne aristocracy; once married to Duke Ernest, she had disappeared behind the hedge. She had never, from her youth upward, come into contact with any form of real life outside her castle walls; she had no idea how the poor existed, or the rich, or what anybody did in art, commerce, philanthropy, politics, beyond the little set of coroneted cousins who formed to her—although, of course, she knew there were common people, and also Chinamen—the whole sentient human race.

Unfortunately for her, the duke, her husband, discouraged her taking any interest in the many things which for him had no existence, and also in the few pursuits which, engrossing most of his attention, lay, as he said, beyond her ken. He had, of course, a small army of officials under him—an “intendant,” a treasurer, inspectors, stewards, head-foresters, head-keepers, etc.; he was under these in

so far as he listened to all their proposals; he stood next to them in so far as he always suggested something else. His valet, morning and evening, reported all the gossip and the scandal that ought never to have reached so august a personage, and kept back, at his own discretion, any mention of abuses the duke would have combated had he known. Unable to delegate work to others, convinced that he could do everything far better himself, his "transparency" poked a silver-headed cane into every dung-hill on his estate and ordered it to be removed to some equally offensive corner. Often it was not removed. And if he found it again, he had either forgotten all about it, or he passed it by in silence, or he made an immense to-do about it—a small revolution—according to the humour he happened to be in. The part he should have played, in public life in the government of the country, he was utterly unfitted for, and so he stopped at home and trifled.

He interested himself in the welfare of his servants and their wages, and insisted upon personally scolding them. One after another the duchess's housekeepers left, and her servants gave warning—there were two or three loyal domestics, hereditary, who made life impossible for any of the others—and the semi-

royal household was filled with kitchen squabbles and backstairs abuse, such as many would imagine to be perfectly impossible in palaces. The duchess paid little attention to these matters; for whenever she tried to do so, her husband intervened, snubbing her, and telling her that she ought to have managed it all very differently, and now he would have to put it right, and he wished she hadn't interfered. She had got into the habit of not responding to his violence, excepting by an irony he never understood. Once, on the terrace, among the tubbed myrtles—myrtles!—just as she was slowly moving away, a beautifully haughty figure, from a discussion about some reprimand of his she had tried to tone down, she paused and turned, with a well-known sweep of her little dark head:

"I am never to interfere," she said, "between you and the maids? I have no intention of doing so. Not even when you kiss them!" And she left him, and walked away to where she could hear her children calling across the wide stretch of lawn.

"Dear me, how exceedingly awkward," he said to himself, violently sniffing, as he always did when excited. "I had thought she was far too stupid to know. But she's not. Well, I daresay she'll be too scornful to mind." With which comforting reflection

he also went his way to the cow-houses to inquire about a calf.

And, indeed, she was too scornful to mind. When she met him at dinner—there were only the two of them—she asked half a dozen questions about general subjects, to which she knew he would have no reply. She herself did not care for the answers, though she fancied she did. In any case, it would be difficult to tell any one at a moment's notice whether the peace of Europe remains assured or whether proportional suffrage exists in Spain, especially if neither of the persons conversing feels even a perfunctory interest in the matter, or has more than the faintest idea what "proportional suffrage" means.

"The evenings are rapidly shortening," said the duke; "we shall soon be getting round to the shooting." And he rubbed his hands. There was one happiness in life, as he well knew—sport. All the rest simply was because it had to be. The non-shooting months of the year were so much unavoidable waste of time.

The duchess also preferred the autumn. Guests very seldom came to Stolzenau, for the duke did not like the inconvenience of receiving them; and, besides, everybody found the place intolerably dull, but at this time of year the house filled; there were a couple

of famous battues; the duchess, half frightened, enjoyed receiving the numerous visitors. Gradually she woke up, and liked her dresses and the brightness and laughter and the amusing things some of the gentlemen said. Then, by the time she had got accustomed to it all again it was over, and she sat alone opposite the duke.

"That reminds me," said the duchess, "we shall soon have to see about a tutor for Wilhelm." Wilhelm was the eldest son, aged ten.

"I know," replied the duke.

"You remember," she continued with slow insistence, "we agreed that next winter Wilhelm was to have a tutor in any case."

"I know, I know. There's plenty of time," said Duke Ernest, taking wine.

She flushed. Here was one of the many points of disagreement between them; for she was always trying, in the teeth of his tacit indifference, to get the children taught something.

"You talk as if the boy were to grow up for a 'schoolmaster,'" he said. "The Stolzenaus have always managed to get on——"

"By their inherent stupidity!"

"Thank you. No; by being Stolzenaus."

"Those times are over. Now-a-days a man is what he is worth."

"What do you know of the times, my dear Eleanor? A Stolzenau will always be worth more than most other men. But do not excite yourself: as it happens, I have taken steps to secure a teacher for Wilhelm."

"Without telling me!" she cried angrily.

"I never tell you about engaging servants. The last time I told you was about the new pig-keeper, and you said you did not care."

"But my own son!" She struck her finger tips nervously on the table-cloth. Duke Ernest sniffed. "'Tis the best pig-breeder in the country," he said; "we shall get a first prize at the show."

"And to whom, pray, is Wilhelm's future to be intrusted?"

"Oh, nothing is settled. I asked my uncle, the prince-bishop, to find us a young theologian. He wrote me that he knew of nobody at the moment, but that he had mentioned the subject by accident to your Uncle Sigismund——"

"Uncle Sigismund! The very last!"

"So I should have thought. But we were both wrong. Your uncle has a suitable person, born and bred on one of his own estates, as I understand; a young man who has just completed excellent studies—he strongly recommends him."

She sat trembling from head to foot, trying not to tremble. "You have engaged," she said at last, "this *protégé* of my Uncle Sigismund?"

"Yes. Don't be absurd, Eleanor; I had forgotten to tell you about it. I had so much in my head; what with the farms——"

She rose from the table. "I am going up to wish the children good-night," she said. Then she burst out: "Uncle Sigismund! A *vaurien*! A *panier percé*! A man of the world! A Voltairean! A dandy! To him you apply for a teacher to educate my child!"

He stared at her. "I do not understand you in the slightest," he said. "What queer, violent expressions you use! Uncle Sigismund——"

"No, you don't understand me in the slightest," she said, passing out through the door he held open for her. An hour later she once more sat by him in his own room, as always of evenings. He smoked at his bureau, surrounded by ledgers. She, with a low lamp at her right hand, made tea. The long silence seemed to irritate him, though often if she spoke he would beat his foot on the floor and repeat figures aloud. "Why don't you go and play the piano?" he said. "You are giving that up altogether." Then, as he remembered about "kissing the servants," he added

graciously: "When I married you they said you were the finest musician in Vienna."

"There was always Bangowski," she replied, a little bitterly.

"Of course I didn't mean professionals. But you never touch the piano now."

"No; why should I? Do you want me to go and sit alone in that big room of evenings? In the winter there isn't even a fire!"

"You could have a fire lighted. And, besides, this isn't winter."

"True, you are quite right. There is no reason why I shouldn't play the piano."

"But——"

"But I don't. This man who is coming—pardon, do not let me disturb you at your work!"

"No; I am very anxious to get through with all this before the shooting party comes down."

"When is that?" she asked, pouring out the tea.

"I have asked most of them for this day three weeks. Is there any one you would care to have besides the usual lot?"

"No, thank you. And the tutor, when does he come?"

"About the same time. I daresay your uncle will bring him."

"We shall hardly have time to pay much attention to him then."

"Do you intend to pay him attentions?"

She did not answer. After all, a woman can not strike a man; though a man can hourly strike a woman. She refused to revert to the subject again, yet it was constantly in her mind. She was passionately proud of her eldest son, passionately fond, under frigid reserve, of all her flaxen children.

When the tutor appeared amid a flow of guests, she received him with unintentional indifference. Uncle Sigismund, a fine old beau of seventy, with a slim waist and bright complexion, introduced a timid, insignificant, dark-eyed young man—Herr Goertz. The duchess hoped Herr Goertz would be happy at Stolzenau, and turned to some one else. At dinner Uncle Sigismund sat beside her and was very gallant and a little *risqué*, telling many amusing stories about the wicked world he knew so well.

Late at night the duchess knocked at her husband's dressing-room door. His valet was with him. The duchess motioned the man to retire.

"This Herr Goertz," she began abruptly, "who is to be the teacher of Wilhelm—I know nothing of him, nor do you."

"He looks just the kind of person that

sort of person ought to look," replied his Transparency, winding his watch.

"Ernest, all I wish to say is this: I will let that man become Wilhelm's tutor on one condition, on one condition—do you understand me?"

"Well?"

"That if ever I should wish him to leave the house he shall go!"

"Oh, of course! Why?"

"He is probably unsuitable. My Uncle Sigismund's idea of a tutor is sure to be as bad as bad can be. I will not have Wilhelm sacrificed to Uncle Sigismund's notions. I shall watch this man. If he be anything like what I expect him to be, he must go."

"Very well. Don't watch him too much at first; he already seems sufficiently nervous. Wilhelm will grow up all right. He is beginning to shoot rabbits quite nicely—almost as well as I did at his age. Good-night."

"Sleep well." The duchess lay awake some time thinking of her half a dozen children, and of Uncle Sigismund's stories, and of Vienna. Then she fell asleep to the moaning of the wind among the pine trees.

It was not till after the departure of the guests that she again realized the presence of the tutor. Then, first, she discovered him, as it were. He was a pale young man, tall, dark,

uninteresting till he lifted his eyes. Wilhelm, when interrogated, shrugged his shoulders and said the tutor knew a lot.

"It is you who know nothing!" exclaimed his mother, annoyed.

"I can shoot," replied Wilhelm complacently, "and I can talk languages. Papa says that is enough for a Prince Stolzenau, mamma."

"Your father laughs at you," she replied, and added loyally: "He himself can do a great deal more." She left Wilhelm reflecting on his father's abilities. That evening, in the dulness of the duke's room, she rang the bell for a servant.

"Tell Herr Goertz that I wish to see him here," she said. The duke looked up in annoyance from his newspaper. "We shall not disturb you," said the duchess.

"Barley is up," complacently responded the duke.

The tutor was startled by the summons, for he had not yet come in contact with the mistress of the house. He hurriedly arranged his toilet. The man servant waited with a smile. "She won't notice that," thought the servant.

"I should like to look over your list of work," said the duchess; "I should like to know what you do."

He flushed with pleasure. It was the first word of interest in his labour which reached him in the desolation of this princely household. "Durchlaucht sind zu gütig," he said.

Those were words she heard daily; she was sick of hearing them. With a little smile of disdain she bade him tell her about Wilhelm.

"Prince Wilhelm is backward," the tutor said boldly, and suddenly she looked straight at him with fresh interest in her face. She made him fetch his table of lessons and went over its details. He answered as best he could, eager about the task he had set himself, a little dazzled by her white neck, her white dress, her jewels, the perfume floating around her, the unaccustomed title of her princely rank.

"If Frau Herzogin will permit me," he said, pointing, "I have a second hour here, on Thursdays, for orthography."

"What is orthography?" asked Duke Ernest, suddenly looking out behind his paper, irritation in his voice.

"Spelling," interposed the duchess quietly: her husband laughed.

"What a long word for a simple thing!" he cried. "That's just like all your teaching. Why, I've spelt all my life, and never known it was orthography."

"Thank you, mein Herr," said the duchess, gravely returning the card; "I hope that

my son will reward your endeavours." The teacher bowed and withdrew. Scarcely had the door closed upon him when:

"You see, he says the boy is backward!" cried the duchess.

"Of course he says so. Six months hence he will say that Wilhelm, thanks to his good teaching, is ahead of all other boys. When Rudel came he said the pigs——"

"I am going to bed!" cried the duchess.

"Good-night!" She left him. She was getting into this habit of going to her room not much after nine. Sometimes she read a novel; sometimes she yawned herself to sleep.

It was on one such weary evening, shivery, drizzly, with a beat of rain and moan of trees, that the duchess, crossing the great hall upstairs to her apartment, noticed a sound of music from the children's corridor. She went back a few paces, opened a baize door, and listened. Suddenly her eyes shone bright—she had recognised the melody. She passed down the corridor to one of the schoolrooms—Wilhelm's—and paused for a moment outside. Then she slowly pushed open the door and entered. Herr Goertz was at the piano. He stopped, in confusion, rising rapidly to his feet.

"Where did you learn that tune? Where

do you come from? What is it?" stammered the duchess, seeking to control her agitation.

"It is Carinthian, Frau Herzogin. It was taught me by a cousin, who is a game-keeper on the estates of your highness's father. I was only trying some variations."

"I know," already she had stiffened. "You surprised me. It is ten years at least since I last heard that tune. Do you know any more of the melodies of my home?"

"Yes, Frau Herzogin."

"Have the kindness to play me some."

She gave the order as she might have given it to a servant. He coloured, sat down at the piano, and began. She stood listening by the door. There was no other light in the room than that of the pianoforte candles. Presently she sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

He played on for several minutes, passing from one folk-song to another, blending them together in an arrangement of his own. When he finished there was a moment of silence.

"You play superbly," she gasped, and left the room.

There was no reading of novels that night. The Duchess Eleanor, whom nobody ever saw weep, lay on her bed in a long torrent of tears.

For two days she took no more notice of the tutor than merely to acknowledge his deferential salutes. An old maiden aunt of Duke Ernest came to stay at Stolzenau—a terrible Princess Valeria, of whom everybody was afraid. This lady inquired about the tutor, disapproved of his German pronunciation, asked where he came from, told him he oughtn't to, and finally, in the course of an intolerable evening, sat up from a snooze and demanded to know whether "the Austrian" could play.

"I don't know, I'm sure. I never asked," replied the duke.

"He can play," said the duchess calmly.

"Then send for him and tell him to, for goodness sake!" cried the Princess Valeria.

"But *I* must go on with my work," exclaimed her nephew in distress.

"Nobody wants you, Ernest. Eleanor and I, we will go to the music room with the tutor. And, Herr, have the goodness to play me some dance music!" said the Princess Valeria.

So the tutor played Viennese waltzes, and the Duchess Eleanor quivered in her great Louis XIV *bergère*. Then, unasked and therefore unpermitted, he glided on into some of the Carinthian melodies he had reproduced so beautifully the other night.

The Princess Valeria rapped the table with her fan.

"That, Herr, is not dance music," she interrupted.

"Local dances, your highness," he answered, looking up from the keyboard. In the full light of the chandelier the duchess recognised and delighted in the adorable impudence of his eyes.

"You are from Boedling," said the duchess, as soon as he stopped, "my Uncle Sigismund's place—you were born there?" Yes, he confessed, he had been born on the estate.

"They are not Germans at all," said the Princess Valeria.

"I have been there so often as a child," said the duchess, musingly. "I remember——"

"Eleanor, shall we go back to your husband? It is chilly here. Why don't you make your servants keep up the fires?"

"I thank you very much for your playing, Herr Candidat. You must come down oftener of evenings and make music." He bowed to the ground before her beautiful presence.

"But I have heard," he said, stammering with due apology, "that Frau Herzogin herself is one of the most admirable performers of the day."

"That day is over," said the duchess, and swept aside for her aunt to pass out.

Every evening of the princess's stay after that there was music in this otherwise deserted saloon. The tutor was indeed a musician of great merit, himself a musical instrument that flung all its passion across the chords. He played Slavonic and south Austrian melodies—Hungarian and Polish—his execution was all sentiment and fervour, all eagerness and excitement and thrill. He played only such music as he knew he could master—the music of torrents and whirlwinds, of thrushes and larks. Duke Ernest, in the pauses of his labours, came, sat down in a corner, and dozed.

"Permit me," said the duchess at the musician's elbow. He had just stopped playing; he sprang from his seat.

She took it without lifting a face. Nevertheless he saw the fire in her eyes, the gasp at her breast. She struck the first fierce notes of Uhlman's *Rhapsodie hongroise*, hesitated, then glided into Tscherkowsky's *Monlied*—the sensuous adagio sank like balm on the wounds of the other's striking.

Presently Duke Ernest sniffed. She broke off with a bang, rising hastily.

"Aie! what has happened?" cried the duke, sitting up; "Eleanor, at the piano!

My dear aunt, this must be in honour of you."

"Pray continue," said the Princess Valeria.

"No; we have had music enough for to-night. I am tired," replied the duchess. "Please give me leave, Aunt Valeria, to withdraw." She swept a deep courtesy to her relations, ignoring the tutor, and walked away.

"It is incredible how tired she often is," said the Princess Valeria. "I think she ought to take more exercise."

"I hate walking," replied the duke; "I think she ought to drink milk."

"Milk is fattening. I shall tell her she must walk," said Valeria decidedly.

"Well, then she must go with the children, for I have no time."

"The children creep," replied the duchess when this plan was proposed to her.

"Wilhelm does not creep," said her aunt.

"Do you want me to walk with Wilhelm and the tutor?"

"Why not? And one of the governesses, of course. Or without the tutor. Absurd!"

"Absurd, indeed; I should never have thought of such a thing," said the duchess. Nevertheless she now frequently took walks with the elder children and their teachers. Sometimes the tutor was of the party, some-

times he was not. And occasionally she had brief talks with him about Uncle Sigismund's home, which was the tutor's home also; about her own home, which he knew so well, for there was the home of his cousins—of home, home, home—brief burning talks about the distant southern country, so different from the sand and the small pines around them, the dear land of brightness and gaiety—home.

And in the evenings she listened to the tutor's playing; once or twice even, while Duke Ernest grumbled in his armchair, she played a few duets with the tutor. But his hands trembled; he struck the wrong notes. She rose from the piano annoyed.

"He is vulgarer than I thought," she said to herself; "it frightens him to play duets with a princess!"

But a day or two later she asked Wilhelm what was the tutor's Christian name.

"Ernest," said the boy, "like papa."

"Ridiculous!" cried the duchess, greatly vexed. Wilhelm told the tutor, and the tutor drew his own conclusion. "It is an impertinence, I know," said the tutor; "but I can not help it, prince." It was under this bitter impression that he answered the duchess, on one of their walks, when she asked him what his political opinions were.

"I am a Socialist, Frau Herzogin. At

least, of course, I am a moderate Liberal; but to your highness that would mean the same as a Socialist, I suppose." She resented the vaguely felt taunt. Of late they had often had really instructive conversations; he was opening up a new world to her, and now he chose to be dumb. Instantly she drew up the drawbridge, which she never let down for long. That evening, again, she stood listening to his playing in the twilight. Duke Ernest had one of his bad boils on the neck. He could not, or would not, look after his farm accounts. He lay back on the sofa complaining and sniffing, and his favourite servant poulticed him. The duchess, from where she stood by the window in the half light, could see her husband's pasty face beneath the lamp-shade, and could also see, against the steady candles, the clear-cut features, the dark complexion, the gleaming eyes of the tutor. She stood watching them long.

"Ernest," she said that evening, pausing beside his couch, "I am come to remind you of your promise. The tutor must go."

"Eh? What? Ow!" exclaimed the duke as he turned his neck.

"You remember you promised me I should do as I wish. I want another tutor for Wilhelm."

"Nonsense! I thought you liked this man

Goertz. You seem to get on well enough with him."

"I do not know what you mean by 'getting on' with him. I do not think he is the right man here. I wish him to go."

"You do not like him?"

"What an expression! I have my reasons for thinking he ought to be replaced."

"Has he been making love to one of the governesses? He's a good-looking fellow. Ha! ha!"

"You are coarse," she said haughtily. "He has always acted with the greatest propriety; we must let him get some other more lucrative occupation. But I do not think he is the right man for a tutor here. You have given me your promise."

"Nonsense!"

"You refuse?" She stood away from him, splendid in her silver brocade.

"Yes; unless you give me some rational reason. I am perfectly satisfied. Why, your uncle is coming to-morrow; what explanation could I give him for dismissing the man?"

"You—you promised," she exclaimed.

"Nonsense! I say, give me a reason."

"My reason? To see whether the Duke of Lauenstein can keep his word to his wife."

"Well, you are answered. The Duke of Lauenstein can break his word to his wife."

She went toward the door. "Ring, if you please," he called after her; "I can't think why that fellow don't bring the poultice!"

Next afternoon came Prince Sigismund, and the duke recounted to him, with roars of laughter, how Eleanor had taken a sudden dislike to Goertz. The old gentleman listened attentively, curling his waxed mustache.

"And why is this, my niece," he queried after the tale was told.

"Ask Ernest," replied the duchess, with compressed passion. "He can tell amusing stories. He can also tell unamusing lies."

"Fie, what a word!" The old man said no more, but he curiously eyed his niece's flashing glances at her lord. He waited till he met the tutor—by accident, as it were, next morning in the park.

"Have a cigar?" he said. "You are looking far from well."

"I thank your highness, I am well enough," said Goertz.

"No, I tell you, you are ill," objected the old prince sharply. "This northern air evidently does not suit you. You must come down south again. As it happens, I have an excellent place for you in my estate office."

"Your highness is too gracious. For the present, I would ask leave to stay here. Prince Wilhelm——"

"Confound Prince Wilhelm! I tell you, you had much better resign before they turn you out. The duke, I have reason to understand, is not satisfied with your method——"

"And the duchess?"

Prince Sigismund stopped dead in the middle of the path. "You will give in your resignation at once," he said peremptorily. "You understand? Ask the duke no questions—not a word. Thereby you will save your own position. Simply state that I have offered you so excellent a situation that you crave his highness's permission to accept it. And now hold your tongue."

The young man turned crimson. "I understand," he said; "but I have not merited——"

"I do not know what you have merited. I do not wish to know. Surely you can be satisfied with what you get?"

"I refuse," said Ernest Goertz, still crimson. "If the duke dismisses me, of course I will go."

"You refuse!" exclaimed the Prince Sigismund with an oath. "Say anything like that again, and I turn your old father into the streets!"

"I crave your highness's pardon; I had forgotten my father."

"And will you do as I bid?"

"I beg of your highness, as a favour, to obtain my dismissal from the duke."

Prince Sigismund stared at the young man before him. "By G—, you're a good-plucked one," he said, "but you must go. Here, you've broken your cigar across; have another." A little later he found his niece in the music room. "You play again, now-a-days?" he said with a smile. "Ernest has developed a liking for music."

She nodded to him to leave her in peace.

"Oh! I shall not disturb you. I only looked in to say this: I have got an excellent place for your tutor in my estate office, but the stupid fellow refuses to accept it unless you people advise him to—first dismiss him, in fact. Some scruples of conscience about his duty to Wilhelm. Wilhelm is an idiot, like his father. Any one could teach him the little he is ever likely to know."

She went on playing softly, but she could not keep the tell-tale spot from her cheek. "Well, then, Ernest must give him his conge," she said.

"Ernest will not. Some pig-headedness about not doing as you tell him, I believe. Stupid men never listen to their wives."

She struck a few loud chords in her music. "Of course Herr Goertz had better go," she said. "Did not I say so before?" And she

went on playing until Herr Goetz came into the music room.

"Frau Herzogin, a thousand pardons!" he stammered, as she rose. "It is the hour, I believe, of Prince Wilhelm's music lesson."

"Herr Goertz," she answered abruptly, "you must accept this place of my Uncle Sigismund's. We must let you go."

His eyes sought the floor. "Oh, undoubtedly," he answered; "if I have failed to give satisfaction——"

"There is no question of that. You have given every satisfaction. But this is in your own interest."

"I care little for my own interest. That is to say, my own interest is not the one thing to consider."

"It is right that you should go. I ask you to accept this place; do you understand me—I."

Then his eyes swept up to hers. She stood immovable.

"I will accept it," he said.

He bowed down to the ground. She passed him and went out at the wide-open door.

MRS. RUSSELL.

MRS. RUSSELL was a very good woman, very philanthropic. She said she was connected with "the" Russells, but that was not correct. However, she was connected with very good (socially speaking) Russells—a sort of second-best Russells—and her place in society was Mayfair.

Her husband belonged to that numerous class who earn comfortable incomes, and do comfortable work, in Government offices. His evenings, therefore, were his own; more his own than he desired them to be, for he would gladly have shared them all with Mrs. Russell.

"Algernon is so exacting," said the lady, with considerable truth. "He would like me to stop at home every night in the year; and really, you know, there are duties one owes to society. Not to society as such—oh, no! I am not thinking of these—but to one's fellow men. One who, as I, is engaged in philanthropic work must inevitably keep up a

large circle of acquaintance. I *must* go to receptions and dinners and conversaziones so as to meet the people I want for my work. Algernon refuses to understand how all these things are interlaced."

"I am sure you are admirable," said everybody.

"No, no! I do not mean that. I—I do my best; but life is very difficult, especially philanthropy. Now, there are the children. Sometimes I fancy Algernon thinks I neglect them. He never says anything. Yet I have always been so especially careful not to neglect the children. I have gone through "line upon line" with them twice. And they both have classes of their own at my Sunday school. You can not think how sweet it is to see dear little Mary—she is only seven—teaching other children the stories out of Genesis. And Justin! he is such a delicate boy. I have always been especially anxious about his health."

"Your children will rise up and call you blessed," said a man in a white choker who had come to collect.

But that was prophecy. At the present moment Justin, a weakly boy of ten, over-indulged in every sickly fancy, did not bless but abuse. He had got into an ugly habit of calling his mother names, nor did the Scrip-

ture cards which she hung about his bedroom prove an efficacious remedy. So she pretended not to hear, and would smilingly remark to little Marian that Justin had got his bad headache again; whereupon Justin would grow exceedingly violent, until sometimes, but rarely, his father would happen to look in and box his ears. Then Mrs. Russell would be greatly annoyed at her husband, and possibly would say so in the children's presence, explaining that love and philanthropy and prudence and gentleness and wisdom preclude the boxing of ears. Justin early accepted this opinion, and also discovered that ill-health was a powerful lever by which to move his mother's otherwise ponderous will. "Sickness is a blessing in disguise," said Mrs. Russell, and Justin, when not too sick, agreed.

So he didn't go to school, but stopped at home and worried the servants. If he didn't want to drive, he had the stomach ache; but if his mother promised not to pay calls, the stomach ache would disappear. He was omnipresent, always noisy, always troublesome; and if Mr. Russell ventured to declare with sudden warmth that things must alter, that the boy must go to boarding school, Mrs. Russell would look up angrily from her tracts and her missionary reports and say that the child was ill.

Meanwhile, little Marian grew up all to herself—unnoticed but for the warmth of her father's good-night kisses—as sweet and as frail as a little girl could be.

And all sorts of charity claims gathered round Mrs. Russell and stuck to her like limpets. She was a portly, handsome woman, who had never known an ache in her life. Occasionally she would feel very tired, but a ten-mile walk would always rest her. Once her shoulders were recognised to be broad and strong and willing, all the woes of the world came tumbling down upon them. And she bravely put her strength to the work. She was willing, of course, and she had every mortal's pardonable love of approval, but she honestly rejoiced to think of the good she was doing—honestly even when her name appeared in printed lists of patronesses, with an H. R. H. at the head.

"Going out again?" said her husband, as they met at the hall door.

"Yes, of course. Don't you remember that I told you? I am going to dine with Lady Gawtry, to meet Lady Foye."

"Dear me! and I—where am I to dine?"

"At the club, I suppose. How can you be so irritating, Algernon! You refused Lady Gawtry's invitation, you know you did. You

told me to write that you had a previous engagement."

"Well, I had entirely forgotten. I suppose you must go."

"Of course I must go, at this last moment! Besides, I am most anxious to meet Lady Foye. She is the President of the Guild of St. Mary of Magdala."

"I see. And is Lord Gawtry connected with that business, too?"

"How can you speak so coarsely! He is not on the committee, but I should be much surprised if he did not dine with us. He takes an intelligent interest in the work." She spoke the last words with much meaning, and drew her fur cloak round the low neck of her yellow satin dress.

"Oh, indeed! Takes an interest, does he? An intelligent interest!"

Mr. Russell burst into loud laughter, which was not, however, entirely mirthful. He passed upstairs, without waiting to hand his wife into the carriage. In the nursery Marian sat looking out for her good-night kiss; he gave it her.

"Where are you going, father? Why have you got your coat on?"

"I am going to dine at the club, child."

"I should like to dine at the club," responded Marian, already half asleep, "moth-

er—says—you get such delicious dinners there.”

He stood looking at the child for a few moments before he went out. The next morning he said to his wife:

“Marian is looking very poorly; I should like to take her to Sir Henry Parsons.”

“Marian? I didn’t notice. That is her usual colour. By all means, let us show her to Sir Henry. I was just thinking I should like to consult him about Justin.”

“In that case let us take them both. There will be less chance of having them sent away in opposite directions. Now, Marian to me looks as if she stood in need of a little Riviera sunshine.”

“My dear Algernon, I do trust Sir Henry will not recommend any travelling. Young children are much better at home. And, really, I could not leave London at this moment. For the next month my presence in town is essential. The Piccaninny Company is largely dependent on my aid.”

“And what, pray, is the Piccaninny Company?”

She stared at him indignantly.

“Algernon, you do not mean to say that you have forgotten?”

“For the moment I can not——”

“You take no interest in any of my work”

—the angry tears were in her voice. “When I was telling you the other night, I half thought you were asleep! The Piccaninny Sauce Company is the great business undertaking of the Bishop of the Carribee Islands—the Converted Cannibal Islands. It is the recipe of the famous sauce the natives used for centuries with—their primitive fare; it is made of herbs that grow on the islands. It was peculiarly adapted, so they tell me, to—to——”

“Roast piccaninny.”

“Do not interrupt me—to their aboriginal dinner; but it is equally delicious with pork chops. We had it last night at Lady Gawtry’s; I can assure you it is far nicer than ‘Sause Robert.’ And it is best of all, I am told, with fried bacon. It will revolutionize the British breakfast table.”

“But that’s business, not charity. Are you going to start company promoting?”

“Have you forgotten your own contention that the inventor of a nice new sauce is the chief of benefactors? Would it be nothing to add a fresh relish to the artisan’s simple fare? But our aim is far wider. With the enormous proceeds of Piccaninny Sauce—‘Piccaninny’ is a native word meaning ‘pungent’—the bishop hopes to raise funds

enough to build a church in every island of the South Pacific!"

"Even in the uninhabited ones?"

"Scoffer! Yes, why not? Does an empty church, to you, seem a foolish thing? Would you rather see it peopled with Gallios?"

"With what?"

Mrs. Russell blushed a little confusedly. "That was what the bishop said," she replied. "Why, pray, should the large profits always go to the Philistines? In any case, you see it is imperative I should remain in London. I hope Sir Henry Parsons will quite understand that."

"Oh! no doubt Sir Henry Parsons would be made to understand that."

But Sir Henry, after carefully gauging the financial status of the children's father, declared that they must go to the Riviera for a month.

"But surely the little girl's lungs are all right!" cried the mother.

Sir Henry cast a quick glance at her. "Her lungs are all right," he said, "and so are the boy's. But your little daughter *might* go south with great advantage, and your little boy must."

"Must!" exclaimed the mother, pallid.

"Oh, there is nothing radically wrong. General debility."

"I told you so!" She turned triumphantly to her husband.

"I should not recommend the French Riviera," continued Sir Henry, studying his finger-tips. "It is not suitable for children. I should advise you to go to Parlona, on the Italian side, a very sheltered yet bracing spot. There is a very good hotel there, the Grand Hotel Parlona. Good-day."

"Parlona, of course!" exclaimed Russell, as soon as they were in the carriage; "I heard yesterday at the club that he is sending everybody, this year, to Parlona!"

"Algernon, what a mercy it is we went to him!"

"He has shares in the hotel. Of course, we shall not go there!"

"Not go there! And the boy?"

Justin pricked up his ears.

"He said nothing serious was wrong with the boy. He put him forward because he saw that you——" The husband checked himself and looked out of the window. Presently he took and pressed his little girl's little hand.

"Do not speak to me just yet," said Mrs. Russell in great agitation. "It is very difficult. My life is so hard to arrange. I *can not* leave London. But of course the children must go. Justin, don't you feel a draught?"

"Yes," replied Justin; "let's stop at a sweet-shop and buy some jujubes."

"I shall get down at the corner of Cockspur Street," said the father.

"May I go with you, father?" asked Marian.

"Where would you go, child?"

"To your club. Mother says gentlemen's clubs are the most beautiful places in London."

"Mother is mistaken. But they don't admit little girls into clubs."

"When *I* am grown," interposed Justin, "I shall belong to a goose club like Martin, and have roast goose once a month."

"Do you belong to a goose club, father?" questioned Marian, her innocent blue eyes turned aloft.

"Yes, dear, a very large one."

"What is the name of yours, father?" queried Justin. "Martin's is called 'The Jolly Tipplers'; he wouldn't tell me, but I kicked his shins."

"Martin!" exclaimed Mrs. Russell in horror. "'The Tipplers,' and he took the Blue Ribbon six months ago!"

"Mine is called 'The Benedicts,'" said Russell; "I believe I am an honorary member. Here we are in Piccadilly."

"Ah, that reminds me!" exclaimed Mrs.

Russell, with a fresh note of genuine distress. "The annual meeting of the Piccadilly Night Association is next Monday week. Algernon, my presence in town is indispensable."

"Yet I foresee that you will go with Justin," replied Algernon. "The whole Parlona business is utterly absurd. At least visit Cannes and Nice, and introduce your sauce into all the big hotels."

"True," she said earnestly; "there would be work for me everywhere. And nobody is really indispensable. Justin, would you like to go south?"

"If I can take the pony with me," replied Justin, "and pop and the canaries. Otherwise I shall stop at home."

"And go to boarding school," said his father, "while we take Marian."

Justin smiled.

"I couldn't go without Justin," cried Marian.

"Why, Marian, you know he is always pinching you!"

"He won't pinch me any more, father. He's promised."

"Justin's pinches don't hurt," said Mrs. Russell; "he only does it in fun."

So the family began to prepare for their migration, gradually in their conversation accepting the fact. Mrs. Russell came down

one morning with swollen eyes and pallid cheeks, and wrote various official letters to various official ladies. Her husband was touched by her uncomplaining resignation. "They also serve who only stand and wait," he said.

"Justin coughed all last night," replied Mrs. Russell—which was true, for Justin had filched a quantity of almonds.

The father finding his little daughter alone in her nursery took her aside into a corner.

"Marian, can you keep a secret?" he asked in a low voice.

The small girl lifted her solemn gaze to his face. "Not from Justin," she answered.

"Why not from Justin?"

"Because he worries me till he knows."

"Well, he won't worry you this time; he won't know that there is a secret; nor your mother." Whereupon he crept with the child to another well-known physician in Harley Street, and asked, point blank, what was wrong. "Constitutional debility," said the doctor, "increased by want of proper care. The child has been completely neglected." He was angry. "Feed her up—half a dozen eggs a day" (he was a feeding doctor) "and a quart of milk. Your little daughter's condition, sir, is exceedingly critical. Take her

to some bracing climate. The Riviera isn't bracing. Good-day."

That evening Algernon told his wife what he had done. She was deeply hurt. "You can not trust me, then," she said, "with my own children? One would think I was a brutal step-mother! Marian has always been allowed to eat as much as she chose. There is nothing so hurtful as habitual overloading. My mother always used to say, 'Children's stomachs are like dogs', they warn them when to leave off.'"

"But, at any rate, we can not go to the Riviera!"

"We must go, then," she sighed heavily, "to some other part of it. Let us ask some third man."

The third man (who received a commission) recommended the dust clouds of Egypt. So they crossed to Paris, and, much against Mrs. Russell's will, saw a French celebrity, who, for reasons of his own, sent them to Grasse.

The evening before they started Russell, having found Marian in tears, solicited an interview with Justin.

"It is very unfair to you, I know," said the father, exceedingly nervous, "because these things should be part of a system, but I am going to give you a thrashing. I would

much rather promise it you for the next time, but I have done that before and know it would be useless. It is much better that you should know you will get another like it each time your little sister utters a word of complaint."

Thereupon the thrashing was administered. It was not a very bad one, but it fell upon Justin as a tiger might fall upon an old lady at a suburban tea-party. Mrs. Russell sent in her resignation as a member of the council of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. "I am not worthy," she said.

But when she returned from the Riviera two months later, she took up work with redoubled energy among the little children of her parish, and founded, with her husband's fullest approval, a memorial cot at the Children's Hospital. For there were only three members now in the little family. Marian, swept down by a pestilential fever, slept in the cemetery of Cannes on the height that seemed so near heaven. "Closer, father!" she had said, just before she died. Russell had ordered her words to be placed on her grave—nothing more—under her name and age.

There had almost been a dispute between the parents, so eagerly did Mrs. Russell insist on the addition of a text. She was obliged to be content with a couple of sacred em-

blems, thereby somewhat spiritualizing the words.

But when they stood, on their return, in the empty nursery she flung herself weeping into her husband's arms: "Henceforth I dedicate my life," she cried, "to children and girls!" They kissed each other, and were sorry for many things in the past and in the future.

There is much to be done for children and girls. Few people look after their own progeny, and they who do so mostly do it wrong. It is a strange thing to consider, but no labour in all this laborious world is done more vicariously than education. We are all busy improving each other. The Sunday-school flourished in the mews behind Mrs. Russell's house. Justin still had a class.

And the lady smothered the wound in her heart beneath flowers of multifarious charity. Her name was prominent in the prospectuses of those model dairy companies which seek to make the milk of human kindness flow down our dirty streets. She was no philanthropy faddist. On the Home for Aged Cats and the Cab-horses' Day in the Country she turned the broad back of her resolute scorn. What her brain bade her heart to do she did unrestrictedly. And the months glided on in the Mayfair house. Her excellent cook, who

had been with her many years, and knew all the ways of the family, fell ill and died; the new one proved incompetent; there came a period of change and worry and discomfort. Mrs. Russell had numerous meetings to attend and endless parties to go to. Justin grew daily more troublesome. He practised to perfection his two methods of persuasion—slow pulling and sudden yells. His father, since Marian's death, had set himself to ignore Justin as much as was feasible between periods of acute anxiety about the boy's health or dull dread of his impossible future. Day after day the house lay pretty well desolate; in the schoolroom Justin sat convincing his not inconvincible tutor that arduous studies are incompatible with delicate health.

On the evening of the 17th of December, 1893—what does the exact date matter? Well, there's no reason for not putting it in—on the evening of this 17th of December Mrs. Russell came home tired from a long afternoon's work. She had attended, as treasurer, a long meeting of the Council of the Guild of St. Mary of Magdala. She had devoted her usual energy to the proceedings, but really she was sick of the maudlin sympathy shown by some of the ladies and the callous trickery so common among the girls. She had spoken her mind about the outcasts of

society, the harsh mind of a respectable matron who is cold as snow. And she had been still more emphatic as regards the responsibility of educated women. "The influence of each of us in the home," she had said, "should make the whole problem impossible." "Indeed, yes," had said the presiding bishop. "Pray, madam, what age are your sons?" had questioned one timid lady, too faintly for Mrs. Russell to hear.

"Dining at home?" exclaimed Russell, as he met his wife on the stairs.

"Yes, why not? To hear you, one would think I was never at home!" she replied with annoyance.

He did not answer. "Perhaps you," she said, "have some more agreeable engagement?"

"More agreeable?" he answered. "No."

She glanced quickly at him; she thought he looked wretched. With swift woman's pity she set herself to make atonement. They had quite a pleasant little dinner, with bright laughter over recollections of by-gone days. Somehow they got talking about their courtship. When they went up to the drawing-room he kissed her on the back of her neck.

"There is a person waiting to speak to you, madam," said the butler, in tones whose

dignified disapproval had grown mellowed by repetition.

"Very well, Dumster, I shall be down in a minute." She turned to her husband. "Algy, this evening we must keep all to ourselves."

"I fear I have an engagement. I have promised——"

She put her arm round his neck. "Not this evening," she said; "for once in a way let us forget the other people! You must see whether you can still sing me the songs you used to sing in—those days. 'Oh, meet me in the lane'—do you remember?"

"'When the clock strikes nine.' Of course I remember; but there wasn't any lane to meet in. Dear me, I have no idea where the music is."

"Hunt it up, while I run down for a minute." She found a servant in the hall with a note and a verbal message: "I was to ask madam whether I could accompany you," said the man. "The girl of whom I spoke to you sends me word she is dying," said the note. "Could you perhaps manage to go to her? I have a dance to-night. S. Gawtry." There was a postscript: "Piccaninny is doing splendidly. Two thousand more bottles ordered last week."

"Whistle for a cab," said Mrs. Russell to

Dumster. "Tell your master I shall not be gone half an hour." She gave the driver an address in a by-street, barely a mile distant. Thither she drove, in a great fur mantle over her evening dress, with Lady Gawtry's powdered footman on the box.

"This is the number," she said, peering at a card. It was Lady Gawtry's beautiful card with the countess's coronet!

The powdered footman stood impassive. "This is No. 14, wot yer told me to drive to, my lady," said the cabman. Mrs. Russell got out and inquired for Miss de Lacey.

"Walk up, by all means," said the servant girl. "Second door to the left. Do you want me to show you up?"

"Thank you, no; I prefer to find my own way. Is the doctor upstairs?" inquired Mrs. Russell, determined to stand no nonsense from these impertinent girls. The girl burst out laughing. "I should think he was," she made answer. "Been there for an hour. Are you jealous of the doctor, too?" Without another word Mrs. Russell, much disgusted, sailed up the staircase. There was a sound of great merriment in the front room of the first floor occupied by the invalid. Mrs. Russell stopped aghast. Delirium? Then she pushed open the door and walked in.

The sick-room presented an extraordinary

spectacle. It was full of lights, lamps and candles—too glaring—about a field of white tablecloth, brilliant with champagne and flowers. Several gaudy young ladies and gorgeous young gentlemen were grouped about the table, one side of which was pushed up against a pink satin bedstead whereon reclined, in a splendid lace dressing-gown, the invalid. A loud shout of laughter went up on all sides.

"Welcome, my lady!" cried the beautiful occupant of the bed. "Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce you to Lady Somebody, a very particular friend of mine!"

Fresh laughter greeted the sally which many of those present took for a piece of Lottie's exquisite wit. A young fellow, who had had too much wine himself, offered Mrs. Russell a big bumper of what he called "the briny."

"Come, old girl," he said, holding out the sparkling goblet; "come, old girl, have a drink of the briny!"

Mrs. Russell stood in the doorway, facing them all.

"You hussy," she said, "you sent to say you were dying!"

"So I was, this afternoon, for a sight of my Reggie"—she stretched a fondling arm to an inane creature beside her; the lace sleeve fell away—"but he came back this

evening from Paris—naughty Paris!—and now I'm quite well."

"Then don't sneeze over *me* any more!" exclaimed Reggie. She hit him a hard tap on the hollow sounding skull. Another young man, who had duly realized Mrs. Russell's position, sprang to his feet.

"Look here, Lottie," he stuttered, "I call this a beastly shame!" Mrs. Russell turned quickly upon him. "You use the right word, sir," she said, and amid the consternation caused by her suddenness she sailed out with all the honours of war.

Downstairs in the passage the landlady met her. "She's a bad lot up yonder," said the landlady, with a jerk of the thumb; "I have given her notice to go." Mrs. Russell, too much ruffled to reply, moved on towards the door.

"But there's a poor creature lives opposite," said the landlady, following; "a very different sort, that's not long for this world. If you were to go and see her, as you are here, who knows but you might do a power of good, my lady! It's at No. 21, a few doors farther up."

Nothing deterred—rather eager to wipe out the stain on her cheeks—Mrs. Russell walked straight across and found No. 21.

The cab lumbered after her, accompanied by the supercilious Jeames.

"There is an invalid in this house," she said boldly. "Ask whether a lady could see her for a moment; a friend sent by her friend who lives opposite." The maid came back almost immediately and asked her to walk up. In a wide drawing-room, by a cheerful fire and the light of a deeply shaded lamp, a woman lay on a couch; a refined-looking woman, almost distinguished, with a white transparent countenance and great coils of chestnut hair.

"I did not know I was so rich in friends," said the invalid in a low voice. "But sometimes one feels so dull an enemy would not be unwelcome."

"I do not come as an enemy, Heaven knows," Mrs. Russell said almost timidly. "I heard that you were unwell; I thought perhaps there might be something I could do for you."

"Thanks; I need nothing but health, and that no one can give me. Even that," she continued, almost in a whisper, "I should hardly desire for myself—but for him."

"For your husband?" said Mrs. Russell, bold once more.

The other woman fixed her great eyes on her visitor. "No," she said, and added,

"pray sit down for a moment, if you wish. You look hot."

Mrs. Russell sank into an armchair. "You are very ill," she said. "You have found, I fear, that the way of transgressors is hard."

"Ah!" said the woman on the couch, "you are one of those who preach for pleasure? Of course I understood that." She sat up slightly. "There can be no harm in that," she said; "indeed, it is eminently deserving of respect. Why do you not throw back your mantle? That is a very handsome mantle; but, pardon me, I do *not* admire the shade of your dress."

"You are dangerously ill," replied Mrs. Russell; "you say that you know yourself to be dying. Have you *no* conception of your sin?"

The other woman again straightened herself with an effort, and threw such strength as she could into her exhausted voice: "You are serious!" she said. "Well, let us talk seriously. Sin? No; to tell the honest truth, I have no conception of my sin. Thank you for not shuddering. I should rather like to tell you about it; it is very interesting to me, meeting one who thinks like you. Oh! I know your view exactly, of course. It would be interesting for me to give you mine." She

coughed. "Can I offer you anything?" she said—"a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you," answered Mrs. Russell, rigid in her chair.

"I am dying, as you say. It is a very strange, solemn thing to *know*"—she spoke musingly, studying her hands—"to know about yourself, not other people. I am very, very sorry for *him*."

Mrs. Russell waited in silence. Suddenly the other looked up. "I am all he has," she said. "You can not think how strangely these things work around. You do not know he is a married man. There, you see, I have told you. And I—I am not perhaps quite what you think; I don't mean not so bad, but different. I was very lonely—a music teacher—I think I felt even more lonely than poor. And he was very lonely also. He has a wife who—you will forgive my saying it—who takes an interest in all sorts of things, very good things—works, you know, like yours—all sorts of things from morning to night. And so she neglected her home."

"It was not by any means necessary," interposed Mrs. Russell with asperity, "that she should have neglected her home."

"Perhaps not, but she did. The poor fellow used to come home from his office of evenings and find that his wife was out at-

tending charity meetings. She would stop out all the time—dine out—go to all sorts of places, like you, I suppose!”

Suddenly Mrs. Russell thought of her husband waiting at home.

“And he had a dreadful boy, enough to make any father miserable—a boy that’s growing up all wrong. When we first met, one night at Olympia, he was so alone—so utterly alone—his little daughter had died a few months before—we got to talking somehow. ‘I’ve nowhere to go to,’ he said. *I* had nowhere to go to but my room. And so gradually it all worked around. He used to like spending his evenings with me; I used to play to him. I—I play to him, and we talk of all the things his wife has never cared about—the new books and the picture galleries; we have all our tastes in common. Gradually he has told me all his difficulties—all about the boy, for instance, whom his wife’s mad indulgence has ruined.” Her voice was growing very tired; she leaned back. “Now I wonder,” she said faintly, closing her eyes, “has it been so very wicked? Of course you think so. But, I wonder—I often wonder—does God?”

Mrs. Russell, her cheeks aflame, sat staring at the floor immovably.

“And now I am dying. The people who

see me daily do not seem to notice. I haven't ventured to tell Algy."

At a bound the woman in the chair rose to her feet. "The portrait yonder in the darkness," she said hoarsely, "whose is it?"

The invalid, still lying back, half turned her head. But Mrs. Russell had already flung herself across the room. She thrust the photo full under the lamp.

"This man," she said, striking her hand on the upturned cardboard face, "this man——" her voice broke away in sobs.

The other woman, gathering her strength, slid her feet from the couch. "Is it possible," she said, "you know him?"

"My God, what has brought me here to-night!" cried Mrs. Russell, and dropped her face on her hands.

The sick woman rose, tall and thin.

"You are his wife!" she said. "His wife! God forgive me if I have done him hurt!" Then her voice changed to a cry of anxiety. "It is time for his coming," she cried; "nine o'clock! He may be here at any moment! He comes between nine and ten. You must go—you must go at once!"—she took a step forward—"at once! You have made him suffer enough already! He must never know that you know!" She caught hold of her visitor's arm, and almost pushed her toward

the door. "Do you understand me? As one woman to another, I tell you"—there flashed command through her tone—"yes, it is *I* who tell *you*. You have no right to act otherwise. He must never—no never—dream that you know!"

Mrs. Russell hurried down the stairs in dread and horror; she sank back, with a gasp, into the darkest recess of her cab. "Home!" she said, "home!"

There was fury in her heart, and rebellion and misery; she was bitterly angry with her husband; she was mournfully angry with herself. And the desire filled her heart to face him—to face him down in hot accusation of his perfidy, his disloyalty to herself and her child. She!—perhaps she had not acted wisely, led away by her eager pity of the sinful and the suffering; but her error had at least been that of a generous nature: her expiation would be generous too. She would abandon a part—she would abandon the whole of her mission work—alas, one labourer less amid the whitening harvests!—she would dedicate her evenings to her husband, winning him from these creatures—oh, bitter shame!—she would take up her music again, as a girl she had played a little Mendelssohn; she would read not only, as hitherto, *The Review of Reviews*, but also *The Nineteenth Century*.

Perhaps in time of his own accord he would confess his sin. She shuddered as she thought of the shadow dark between them. And the words of the dying woman struck her heart with repeated blows: "You have caused him to suffer enough already. He must never know you know."

Gradually, as she calmed down, the helplessness of the whole thing settled upon her. The conciliation, which, in view of her rival's approaching end, had seemed an achievable solution became an inevitable compromise, nothing more. Their present situation was not the result of a retrievable act, but of a remorseless development. This woman would soon die, so be it. But that would not cause husband and wife to sympathize, whose ideas of life, of duty, whose estimate even of their only child, so inevitably fell apart.

When she reached the house it was with the hope that he would not be waiting for her. A moment later she stood in the deserted drawing-room.

"Master left a message," said Dumster, "that he would not be in before eleven, ma'am."

She drew a chair close to the fire, shivering, and took up the book he had left open and began to read. She read all the evening, thinking her thoughts in a circle meanwhile.

When he came home, late, he found her thus. He sat down in silence at the far end of the room.

"This is an interesting book," she said, without looking up.

"Do you think so?" he answered.

The work was the fashionable psychological romance of the hour; she could not have cared for a word of it.

A break in his tones caused her to look up; she glanced at him keenly. And she saw in his eyes that the sick woman had told him she was dying, and had sent him back to his wife. She rose and went toward him.

"Algernon," she said, "won't you sing 'Oh! meet me in the lane' for me to-night?"

"What, at this time of day? Why, it's nearly twelve. I waited more than an hour for you!"

"I was unavoidably delayed. Well, then, before we go to bed read me a few pages of something, won't you? That article I heard you speaking about, Sodoma's pictures at Siena?"

"Oh, it's far too late," he said. "Besides, you wouldn't care twopence. I'm dead tired. I'm going to bed."

She stood silent. He got up. "Good-night," he said.

"Good-night."

At the door he paused: "Are you coming, too?"

"Not just yet. Good-night."

"Good-night."

When the door had closed upon him she sat down to her writing table and penned various notes to various secretaries. After that she lay back for a long time, with the envelopes spread out before her, gazing at them, thinking. At length she gathered the whole pile together in both hands, and with a sigh which was part regretful, part consolatory, she flung them all upon the dying fire.

PRINCESSE !

IN a quiet Swiss village, away from the snow summits and gorges, among green slopes and greener pastures, with vineyards in the distance and cowbells in the foreground, far up the white country road, as you turn from the blue expanse of Lake Lemman and drive inland till the rough mountains of Savoy have sunk from the vision, and nothing remains around you but gentleness and fruitfulness and sleepiness and sweet abundance of rural rest. In the summer sunshine and vast serenity of sky, among the steady forests and dried-up river beds, where the drowsy butterflies lie still within the sleeping flowers at midday, and the cicadas have curled their tails into repose upon the stolid stones.

Down in a sleepy hollow there lies a sleepy house—a Swiss country house of the old-fashioned type, roomy but nowise imposing, white and green to look at, roughly kept, and somewhat out of repair.

Les Berguettes is the Sausserons' place

near Cugny; and the Sausserons—as everybody in French Switzerland knows, and nobody outside it—are a highly respectable family of Lausanne. Grandfather Sausseron was quite a personage in his day (1802–1867), an eminent chemist who discovered a cheap method of damaskeening various metals, and thus laid the foundation of the fortune of the house. Furthermore, he was a member of the Cantonal Council, and a street in the city is called after his name. Bernard Sausseron, his son, enlarged the business in every way, causing it to prosper mightily. He became so rich that there was much talk of his moving across the lake to Evian to avoid the exorbitant taxes of the canton of Vaud. But he moved away still farther, to a land whither no earthly tax-gatherer can pursue us, and his estate devolved to his two married sons, his married daughter Marie, and his unmarried daughter Claire.

No, that is incorrect. The younger son, Jules, was of course not married at the time of his father's death. He married after Claire even, and the story of his wooing, a nine days' scandal at the time, would be well worth telling of itself. But that would be the story of a man's wickedness, and not of a woman's folly.

The elder sister, Marie, had married first,

married her cousin Bertuchot; when her father died she was already the mother of several chubby children. For Bertuchot was chubby, jolly, good-natured, content to belong to the Sausserons and take part in the business. The *man* of the family was Armand, the eldest—hard-headed, hard-working, hard-hearted, hard-pressed. The soul of the united factories, the will of the various households, the brain and the hand of it. A serious, simple man, living almost austere, content to know that others knew his unshown wealth.

His, and that of the others, for he held it all in his own care. None of them would have ventured to ask him for any accounts. He paid to the Bertuchots a sum of forty thousand francs a year in four instalments; to Jules he paid fifteen thousand, and to Claire he paid five. For his own household he never spent more than thirty. Old Sausseron was worth at the time of his death, it is creditably reported, about ten million francs. Armand paid taxes on that amount, and more. Claire, the unmarried daughter, went to live with Armand when her father died—the mother had been buried and forgotten many years. Claire was nineteen at the time of the old man's death, a tall rather striking girl with a mass of fair hair and magnificent black eyes. Her father had refused two offers of marriage

without consulting her. One was from an old friend of his own, whom Claire would never have accepted; but she nearly cried her eyes dim over the other, which came from her drawing master, a young Italian, rendered bold by his perception of how deeply she was in love with him.

She took up her abode with her masterful brother and his insignificant wife. When the brother bullied her—which happened rarely, for his influence over them all was chiefly tacit—she went to stay during several weeks with her sister Bertuchot, and, in any case, the whole family spent a great part of the summer together at Les Berguettes. Jules would go off to his races and other similar amusements; the married women would shop and pet their children; nobody minded much what the others did, as long as, when they met from time to time, they were not in each other's way.

Claire had amusements enough, or rather let us call them distractions. She was exceedingly gifted, and she made frequent use of all her talents. Her playing and singing were beyond the average of amateurs—that is not saying much—of accomplished amateurs. She painted in water colours better than she sang or played. Her education had been all that the schools of her native city, joined with

natural intelligence, could make it. In fact, her old father used to say the girl knows every possible thing a woman ought to know and every possible thing she needn't. She was well read in all the lighter literatures, and about things in general she could talk with epigrammatic brightness. For science she cared nothing; the dry learning of her school-days time had gently washed overboard. In one word: a pleasant, stylish, witty girl, better informed and more truly accomplished than most.

Why all this about Claire? Because it is in itself the story. It explains the story's end.

Claire is the story. An epic in the early stately repose of her wealthy childhood; a lyric with the drawing master; a long elegy at Les Berguettes—and at the close a tragic-comedy; but that is too fast!

Les Berguettes was her favourite resort. She had got tired of Lausanne society, which she scornfully termed provincial! She was sick, she said, of dining between cousins, and before her courteous indifference the suitors shrank away. She was an heiress; she sent for frocks from Paris. People began to speak of her, especially mammas, with a certain asperity.

On a beautiful August evening three young fellows, lazily floating in a boat along

the shore of Ouchy, lay discussing, with languid interest, Claire Sausseron. The purple shadows swept in heavy folds across the dark blue water. A light caught here and there, amid gathering darkness, the distant city spires.

"You see, she's our biggest match," said Ernest Bertuchot, from Lausanne, to his cousins Pierre and Jacques de Brissay, from Paris.

"That in itself, of course, is interesting," replied Pierre de Brissay. "She's a cousin of yours!"

"A sort of cousin, and her sister married my cousin George."

"In fact you are all cousins. Why not? I suppose it can do no harm. What age is this young lady?"

"About twenty-five, I suppose."

"Twenty-five! My dear Ernest, she must either be a hunchback or not as rich as you say."

"She has a tongue that can say 'no,'" replied Ernest sullenly.

"You speak with personal animus!"

"Come, that's not fair," interposed Jacques from the bow.

"And a fortune of two or three millions."

Pierre sat up. "A fortune of two or three millions," he replied. "Phew! I'll try."

Ernest laughed scornfully.

"She is bored by all you Swiss cousins," continued Pierre. "Let us see what she will say to a Parisian, a new element—Monsieur de Brissay!" And he twisted up his mustache with a little chirrup of amused content.

"Pooh!" replied Ernest, annoyed. "Once before, years ago, a foreigner tried his luck—an Italian, her drawing master. That time she was smitten. Had she taken any foreigner, she, with her love of art, would have taken him." He spoke with great decision, anxious to prove and believe what he said.

"I am not a drawing master," answered Pierre.

In the twilight Jacques bent forward. His was a clear-cut poet's face and shapely head. "Ah," he said, "she loved her drawing master, this wealthy bourgeois beauty! The talk is not so dull as I thought!"

"Sausseron!" reflected Pierre aloud; "there is Jules Sausseron, whom one meets in all sorts of shady places. Jacques, you must have met Sausseron?"

"No," replied his brother curtly.

"He is Claire's younger brother. He is not worth much," acknowledged Ernest.

"*Tiens!* you have young men here who are not all praiseworthy? This Jules is her

brother—how lucky!—if he be here in Lausanne I will get him to present me at once.”

“He is here, I know, for a day or two. He is starting on a journey. We shall find him at the club.”

They rowed leisurely to land and took the tram to Lausanne. As Ernest had prophesied, they found Jules at the club, playing billiards with a friend, an Italian, whose name the young men just caught—Pagliardini.

“We are going off together to Aix les Bains,” said Jules, “to try our luck at the Casino des Fleurs. I am sorry I can not show you any hospitality, but I will give you a letter of introduction to my brother at Les Berguettes.”

The two Parisians walked to the Hotel Gibbon in the moonlight before they separated for the night; Pierre stood silent a few moments looking at the letter which lay on his open palm.

“Monsieur Sausseron,” he said. “It is not a pretty name. De Brissay is prettier.”

“The Italian’s name,” replied Jacques, by his open bedroom window; “*that* was ugly. Pagliardini! Fie!”

“A good name is worth a great deal in the contest,” said Pierre. “She will approve the ‘de’ and the Parisian.”

"And the Pierre."

"Let the winner laugh last. But you, what will you do while I am away in the country? Stay here and row?"

Jacques turned around and very deliberately answered, "I shall go too."

"Oh, no! thank you. You would be most *gênant*."

"Listen: I made my plan. I shall not go with you. Present yourself as you are. Two days later I shall appear in the village as a painter, an artist, under any name you like. You will know me slightly—in—Paris—no more. I will be poor (Heaven knows that is true enough)—nothing but an artist."

"*Et après?*"

"We will both try for the heiress, you as Pierre de Brissay, I as——"

"Jérémie Briochel!"

"So be it. See, that is only fair. I wish you luck."

"Well, as you like. But very few heiresses marry artists."

"That is true, considering how many fall in love with drawing masters. You are damping."

"Never mind. If neither of us succeeds, there will only be an amusing experience the more in our lives and two more triumphs in hers."

Upon this philosophic reflection Pierre went off to sleep soundly. Jacques's unfortunate temperament forced him to look out of window and murmur:

"Ainsi poussés toujours vers de nouveaux rivages!"

For shame, Jacques! Almost any kind of dream would have been more original.

The next morning saw Pierre at Les Berquettes, where, as cousin to the Bertuchots, he received a kindly welcome from a numerous and kindly family. Mademoiselle Claire took to him at once, for he brought her the perfume of Paris, dreamed-of, delicious, slightly intoxicating. The babble of the boulevards bubbled from his lips, much brighter and more effervescent than when bottled for exportation in the columns of her dearly loved Figaro. He was surprised to find her so well informed, so well read, so "unprovincially provincial," as he put it. She never tired of asking him about all that wondrous world, which, unlike less artificial lights, shines brightest from a distance. They would drop behind or stroll ahead when the others walked about the woods or toward the village. It was a quiet life. Monsieur de Brissay, it was understood, would soon undertake some big excursions.

Meanwhile Monsieur de Brissay continued

to charm the heiress. He made good progress during his two days' start. And on the second evening—a beautiful evening, all violet haze, and green slopes, and returning cow-bells—he met the other gentleman from Paris as Claire and he, a little beyond the others, were inspecting a pig-sty near the trellised village inn.

“Yes,” said Claire, “the peasants here are dirty. They are intelligent and good-hearted, but they are undeniably dirty.”

“All peasants are,” replied Pierre with lofty superiority.

A gentleman, most picturesquely arrayed, strolled out of the inn and came toward them. As he passed, Pierre, in sudden awkwardness, looked away. The stranger immediately turned back, came toward them again, took off his hat, stopped.

“*Tiens*, it is thou!” exclaimed Pierre. “Forgive me, mademoiselle, a friend from the City of Light, as Hugo calls her. Who would have thought to find thee here?”

“I return the compliment,” replied Jacques.

“Oh, I—I always travel! But I thought you stopped at home and worked!”

Jacques cast an angry glance at his brother. “My occupation,” he answered sharply, “requires much travelling. With you, I sup-

pose, much travelling must do for an occupation. Present me to mademoiselle!"

"Permit, Mademoiselle Sausseron, that I present Monsieur Jérémie Brioché."

But at that moment stout Madame Bertuchot and her chubby children came around the corner of the pig-sty, and the presentation had to be gone through again.

"You are staying at the inn?" said comely Madame Bertuchot. "It is astonishing how the beauties of our quiet valley are beginning to attract attention! You must come back with us to supper. Any friend of Monsieur de Brissay would be welcome."

Pierre flung Jacques a look of confident triumph.

"But you must not send us too many tourists," said Madame Bertuchot, as she shuffled along, holding a boy by each hand. "You gentlemen from Paris must not betray our *secret*. For instance, we don't want a lot of artists."

"I adore artists!" cried Claire, quickly foreseeing her sister's blunder.

"And I am an artist," said Jacques almost simultaneously.

A moment followed of most awkward pause, in which Claire pitilessly dropped behind with her companion.

"What did you say his name was?" asked Claire.

"Jérémie Brioché."

She laughed. "It is impossible!" she said. "What a trial for an artist! How could he have had the courage to become one with a name like that?"

"He bravely surmounted the difficulty. He is very brave."

"He is very handsome. But he will never find a wife, poor man! What woman would consent to become Madame Brioché!"

"Well, his mother did," replied Pierre, feeling mean. "But I am glad to find you agree with me: I always say there is much in a pretty name. Yours is a lovely one."

"Sausseron?"

He blushed crimson. "I was thinking of Claire."

"I do not know. After all, the beauty of a name lies in its intrinsic value. No one, for instance, would mind 'Le Comte de Brioché.'"

"Ah! See there the republican, the Swiss!"

"I was merely stating a fact from a certain point of view," she replied uncomfortably.

"Shall we catch up to the others? My brother Armand would not like me to lag behind in the dusk."

"You are very much afraid of your big brother Armand?"

She threw up her proud little head. "I am afraid of nobody," she said, "but of vexing any one! Shall we— Elise, are you there?" He followed her, fearing that he had not for the moment been so successful as heretofore. At table he was annoyed to find how much notice she took of the artist: as a matter of fact she was anxious to atone for her sister's mistake. Nobody in the family except Claire knew anything of modern artistic developments. The subjects which interested Armand in his rare leisure moments were chiefly economical, political, practical; he discovered at once if you knew anything about them and never worried you twice. He had immediately abandoned the gay gentlemen from Paris. As for Bertuchot, *his* hobbies were scientific, and the literature he preferred was the algebraic unravelment of imaginary crime.

"Oh, yes! art, art!" sighed Madame Bertuchot unblushingly. "Ah! monsieur, do you admire Calame? See, there is the true painter of nature! Bertuchot, we should buy a Calame!"

"You can have them in first-rate engravings," put in Armand. "I will give you one if you like for your birthday."

The two brothers de Brissay exchanged glances, and the many oughts that make up "ten million" went rolling across their mental sight.

Late that night they compared notes, not without recrimination.

"You make me absurd!" Jacques said hotly, "with your ridiculous 'Jérémie.'"

"It goes well with the markings of your linen," retorted Pierre coolly; "prophesy my downfall, O prophet! The girl is handsome and charming. Who of us, I wonder, will be rolling in wealth this day six months?"

"I, let us hope," replied Jacques; "I should sooner share with you."

"She certainly said you were handsome."

"Ah!" Jacques tossed back his long, black locks.

"But she declared her firm conviction that you will never find a wife."

"Ha?" Jacques opened his big black eyes.

"Because of your name, Brioche."

"I was a fool to let you make a fool of me. But it is not Brioche will propose to her."

"Oh, come! we have not got to proposing yet. She is blinded by the light of Paris! You will see, she may adore artists, but she will marry a man for his 'chic.'"

"She will choose," replied Jacques a little theatrically, "between Bohemia and the boulevard!"

Whereupon the two brothers, who had been glaring across the table, laughingly shook hands and wished each other good-night.

The first thing Jacques did next morning was to seek out a convenient and conspicuous spot from which to paint the valley. The best spot he discovered gave almost undue prominence to the Sausserons' house, but that could not be helped. He arranged himself before his easel, an attractive figure in his striped flannels, and settled to his work. He really was a very good amateur painter in the first rank of the dilettante exhibitors, everlastingly incapable of plunging down to the foot of the mountain and plodding up the right side. So, also, he could write society verses which everybody in society admired.

They are really very nice fellows, the brothers de Brissay, as all of us are aware, who have known them all our lives. Of course Jacques is preferable to Pierre, who is a little too self-confident and bombastic. The episode of the hunt for the heiress, which was probably half a joke and half a bit of cheerful impertinence, shows them—shows them up perhaps, a little—just as they are.

There is no lighter, happier, jollier man than Pierre, who never does anything. There is no kinder man than Jacques, who is always hard at work on trifles—usually for the benefit of somebody else. It is true, as he said, that wealth in his hands was a blessing to hundreds. Such men die poor. You know of an exception? So do I.

As he worked he sang a song of his own inditing, and Mademoiselle Claire, walking in the dewy garden, paused to listen.

"My heart within the prison sings
Only of wings!"

Mademoiselle looked over the hedge. "That is very pretty," she said. "But, surely, there is more?"

He turned to the big straw hat within the crimson parasol. "Ah! well, it is enough," he answered. "But yes, there is more—thirteen stanzas. How many would you like to hear?"

"What! you know them all?"

"They are my own."

Claire flushed with pleasure. She had never before come face to face with a poet!

"Sing them to me—all!" she said with a child's eagerness of command.

He laughed, and, continuing to sketch, solemnly sang four.

"That is all the song," he explained.
 "The rest is only printed in the poem."

"Your poems are printed!" she cried; then, ashamed of her puerility, "I mean, I could have the volume? Where? I should like to get it. Who are the publishers?"

"I will send you a copy with pleasure."

"You have published under your own name, Monsieur Brioché?"

Here was a dilemma. "Oh, no!" he stammered.

"I thought I had not seen it. What name did you take?"

"Apollon de Hélicon-Parnasse," he replied furiously.

"Ah, well! that is striking. You are taking that background wrong, Monsieur Brioché. The slope is too abrupt."

"Thank you," he answered with some irritation; then a sudden brightening flowed across his face. "You paint, too!" he said; "I had forgotten."

"Forgotten?"

"Yes; one—one has heard of you in Paris. We must have mutual friends."

"I know no one in Paris," she said, looking pleased; "we have been brought up very quietly, but one has connections of course, like your friend de Brissay with the Bertuchots. Monsieur Brioché!"

"Mademoiselle!" he said resignedly.

"I should like to try my hand at setting those beautiful words of yours to a prettier tune. I do not care much for yours. I—I wonder whether I could think of a better?"

• She blushed again over the bold suggestion, with downcast eyes, under her big hat and red parasol, inexpressibly charming. The poet was delighted. He had utterly forgotten the millions. After that they got on most sympathetically. Claire came around to the other side of the hedge and freely criticised the morning's work. And he wrote out his verses for her with a brush dipped in blue on a scrap of drawing paper. They both looked annoyed when Pierre came to call her away.

"The children are waiting," said Pierre. "You remember, you promised to show me the waterfall."

"I am ready," replied Claire. "Monsieur Brioche, you must come up to the house this evening and hear what I have made of your song."

"Ah! he has already been treating you to his songs," said Pierre contemptuously. "*Bon jour, Jérémie.*"

Jacques ground his teeth ever harder than his colours. He could hear Pierre laughing in the distance and the children calling Claire.

That evening she sang him his songs so

exquisitely, with such simple grace and feeling, that he lost at least half his heart, and openly made love to her.

"Well, yes; it is pretty," said Madame Bertuchot, who knew nothing of the writer's identity; "but really I am rather sick of hearing it; you have sung nothing else all day."

"I was busy finding music for the words," said Claire, annoyed.

"You could not speak them without doing that," said Jacques.

After two days of this sort of thing, Pierre felt that he must either act or retire from the scene. He resolved to adopt the straightforward line. So he sought out Armand on the latter's return from Lausanne one night, and, truthfully expressing a great admiration for Claire, courteously asked for permission to court her.

Armand had listened to the end, a great fold across his brow.

"You are, I presume, a Roman Catholic?" he said.

"I am; but, of course——"

Armand rose. "That will do, monsieur. No further discussion of the matter is necessary. My sister would never desire to marry any one of a different religion, nor could we allow her to do so."

"But I was told that her mother——"

"You were misinformed. My mother was a convert from Roman Catholicism before she married my father."

"But perhaps the young lady——"

"Monsieur de Brissay, I must ask you to discontinue your visits to my house."

"So it is simplest," reflected Armand, left alone. "There are a dozen other objections, but why think them out?"

The disappointed suitor soon found his brother.

"Cease your efforts," he said, "or change your religion. *Paris vaut bien une messe.*"

"No, by God!" said Jacques, with unexpected vehemence. He would say no more on that or any other subject. He locked himself into his room and wrote verses all through the night.

That same night Jules Sausseron, the man of pleasure, the gambler, hung, in company with his Italian friends, over a balcony of the Casino des Fleurs, at Aix, lazily watching the music, the flowers, and the bright dresses in the softness of the moonlit heat.

"My dear Sandro, there is no denying it," Jules said carelessly. "I have no wish to deny it. But also I have no wish to hear it repeated. I owe you fifty-three thousand francs."

"And fifty centimes," corrected the Italian.

"D—— the fifty centimes. What for?"

"For the stamps I have twice given you to write to your brother."

"Oh! well; it is no use writing to my brother. In fact, I have not written; the letters contained gossip to Claire."

"But, after all, your millions are your own!"

Jules cast a quick side glance at the Italian. "Yes, at present," he said. "But Armand has them in his keeping. So much the better perhaps."

"He will have to deduct," said the Italian, playing with a cigarette, "fifty-three thousand francs and fifty centimes."

A long silence followed. The band struck up a waltz of Ivanovics.

"Come away to some quiet place," exclaimed Jules suddenly. "I want to talk to you about something." They strolled along a dimly lighted lane into deepening quiet.

"Why don't you marry my sister Claire?" said Jules.

"*Dame*, I do not know the young lady."

"She is charming, handsome, accomplished. I am fonder of her than of any one on earth. She is twenty-five. Well, you are

nearly forty. She would make just the sort of wife you ought to have."

"But supposing she should refuse me?" suggested the Italian, still with indifference.

"She would not refuse you. *Parbleu*, it is not every one can make his wife 'princesse.'"

"Granted. Still, there are difficulties. For instance, I am a Roman Catholic."

"My mother was—once."

"Ah! Well, of course a Princesse Pagliardini would have to accept the religion of her house."

"That, in itself, sounds delightful."

"Nor should I care to be placed under the guardianship of your brother."

"Why not? You would have to ask him for a very large annuity. Trust me, there is no pleasanter, safer arrangement than that for men like you and me. But I am going to tell him he must double my allowance. I want Claire's marriage to help me in that. And—and—if you should marry Claire?"

"I will draw a line through the fifty-three thousand francs."

"And the fifty centimes. Shall we start to-morrow? I detest this place."

"Let us start to-morrow. But do not begin detesting the places where you have lost money. It is a dangerous habit."

"My brother Jules is coming to-night with a friend," said Claire to Jacques when the telegram came. "I am glad that you will meet my brother Jules."

"Yes?" replied Jacques, with a swift sense of approaching complications; and then suddenly he caught hold of her hand, caught it aside from the faults she was prettily pointing out in his landscape, and told her that he loved her, had learned in those few days to love her more—and oh, so differently!—more than any other woman he had ever loved before, told her what his real name was and all his foolish plan of wooing, told her everything with burning words such as a woman loves to gather to her beating heart.

At last she said trembling: "But my brother would never give his consent."

"We must do without it," he answered.

She pondered this strange possibility for a moment before she continued:

"All my money is in his hands."

The tears of spite rose into his eyes.

"It is asking too much of you," he cried, "to bid you abandon the money. And yet—and yet, Claire, we could be happy without it. I could take you to Paris—I would work. Claire, people can be happy without money."

"Hush!" she exclaimed. "Some one is

coming. You frighten me. You have taken me unawares. I must have time to reflect."

"You will answer me! When?"

"To-morrow. Not before to-morrow. Do not make yourself illusions."

"You paint well, Monsieur Brioché," said Madame Bertuchot, "but your style is not the style of Calame."

"Why should it be!" demanded Claire, with asperity.

Madame Bertuchot opened her mild blue eyes. "Why," she asked. "Oh! because I like it best. For me Monsieur Brioché is too modern. I wonder who this friend of Jules will prove to be?"

"I do not care two sous," said Claire.

"What an extraordinary expression! I am always curious about new people. There are so many different kinds."

Madame Bertuchot certainly felt curious—felt a palpitating curiosity about the new sort of person to whom she found herself introduced that night.

"Prince Pagliardini!"

The whole bourgeois family stared open-mouthed at this personage of exalted rank. It can not be said that Sandro Pagliardini took much pains to please them. Wit and brightness were not in his line. Nor could he

speaking of art or of politics or of trade. In fact, he spoke little, brushing up his heavy black mustache and remarking that the wine was good.

That evening Jules, anxious to avoid any erroneous or unfavourable first impressions, took his younger sister aside and frankly told her that he had brought his friend, whom he greatly respected, to see his sister, whom he greatly loved, on the understanding that possible inclinations might lead to a marriage between them—"my heart's desire," said Jules. And he meant it. "Little sister, you would be a princess," he said.

Claire's cheeks glowed. "He is a genuine prince!" she said.

"His is one of the oldest families of Tuscany. At Geneva I bought an Almanach de Gotha. See!" he took out the fat little red volume and handed it to her.

"He does not seem a clever man," she faltered. "I asked him about several things. He seemed to know nothing."

"He is very modest."

"And, a—little—wild—Jules—like you?"

"He is a man of the world, of course, not a monk, but he is devoutly religious."

"Jules, what do you think of Monsieur Brioché?"

"Monsieur Jérémie Brioché? A painter,

Is he not? Oh! I think he is just Jérémie Brioche."

"You have met him before?"

"I have never met him at all. I just saw him pass out in the dusk as we came in. *Tiens*, there is Armand; I must go to him." He ran to his elder brother; they were closeted a long time in Armand's private room.

"A prince! It is delightful," said Madame Bertuchot to her husband.

"It will be delightful," replied Bertuchot, as a brother-in-law."

"What, in Heaven's name, do you mean?"

"In Heaven's name, I mean nothing. But in the world's I mean that he will probably propose to Claire."

"Claire!"

"Yes; I imagine that is what Jules has brought him here for—what else?"

"But he is a Roman Catholic!"

"Yes."

"And a foreigner!"

"Yes."

"And forty—and bald——"

"Yes."

"And exceedingly stupid, one would say!"

"Undoubtedly. Yes."

Madame Bertuchot drew a long breath.

"It would be very strange," she said. "Of course it would have its charm." A little later she waylaid Armand.

"Do not be absurd," said the head of the family sternly. "The man has not been six hours in the house. We shall see. We shall see."

Claire, very thoughtfully undressing, stopped in front of a large cheval mirror, and suddenly swept to the ground in the lowest of courtesies.

"Princesse!" she said aloud.

MADAME DE PARFONDRIEU.

THE keynote of Madame de Parfondrieu's whole life was her love for her only son.

Some people, doubtless, would call that love exaggerated, but not they who are acquainted with the special circumstances of the case. Even extravagance is only a natural development.

Madame de Parfondrieu had been married to her husband at a very early age. She had had no voice in the matter. Her father, in fact, had married her to a good-for-nothing boon companion of his own. Fifty years ago the story was well known in the clubs—my father told it me—how old Breluchon, the money lender, that was drinking with Parfondrieu, whom he had robbed and befriended all through his—the marquis's—long life of dissipation and whose ancestral château he had acquired from him in the end, had one evening made the following proposal in the following terms:

“Parfondrieu, you old fool! I can't un-

derstand why you won't marry my daughter Betty. She is heiress of all I possess; she will restore to your children the home of their father. Meanwhile, if you marry her to-morrow, I will give you with Betty five hundred thousand francs."

"I should be satisfied with less," replied Parfondrieu.

"What the devil do you mean?" exclaimed Breluchon.

"Can't you let me have the five hundred thousand francs without Betty?"

The graceless noble told the story himself, both before and after he had married the heiress. Thus was Betty Breluchon wooed and won. Thus did she become Marquise de Parfondrieu and Châteleine of Mauvry-les-Tours. It can not be denied that she was plain.

The castle and all the money lender's millions had been settled on her by will. The old scoundrel evidently knew a blackguard when he saw him.

Her married life began happily enough. She liked her father's friend, who had always treated her kindly, for Parfondrieu could not but be courteous to a woman. Of love she knew nothing; she was quite contented to obey her father and become the devoted wife of a splendid gentleman who gave her so

much in return for the small gift of herself.

She was twenty-five before she was married. She was thirty before she understood how her husband dishonoured her. She was nearly forty before she realized why he had married her, and that all the money was hers. His faithlessness killed, once for all, all her happiness, all her gentleness, all her trust and respect. It prepared the ground for the gradual discovery of the power which was still left her; she hardened in the realization of her wealth. She was a plain woman, whom husbands did not love, but she was a rich one, whom they had to consider. At forty she was left a widow with one boy.

She adored the boy with a widow's adoration. All the love of her whole life, of her whole nature she concentrated on Louis. And she set herself the hardest of tasks in the daily reiterated resolve that her love should do him no harm.

Nor did it. He grew up honest, straightforward, simple-minded, not quite sufficiently acquainted, perhaps, with all the pleasant pitfalls which some wise pedagogues point out. The church laid her hand on him from the first, and taught him that "without the fold were dogs." But some lambs, unable to remain lambs, refuse to become sheep. He

grew up, as has been said, straight and strong, with blue eyes that saw no guile, yet a big human heart withal, quite ready for human affections and frailties. His mother had no desire to make a hermit of him. She had slowly achieved for herself a great place in society, strictly Catholic society. Her charities, her "conferences," her salon, her favourite priests—these things were of importance, well known. Her son learned everything that was needed for the high position he would occupy; he was a good athlete, a good judge of art, a good gentleman-farmer, an authority on ecclesiastical history from the Jesuit point of view, well acquainted with the rudiments of political economy. He was as innocent as a boy can be who attends confession. And at the age of twenty-one he went to stay with some cousins in Aveyron, whose steward had a very pretty daughter.

Madame de Parfondrieu had of course a steward also, but he is of no interest whatever in the story of her life. She also had a friend who did a lot of promiscuous business for her, a little old man called Chauveau—Antoine Chauveau of Nanterre.

Many people, doubtless, still remember Chauveau. Any number of families employed him, yet nobody seemed exactly to know what he did, although he was always quietly

busy. He had begun life as clerk to the old "banker" Breluchon, and it was sometimes suggested that he had fostered a mad passion for his master's daughter, who was a few years older than he. At any rate, he never married.

This old gentleman called on the marquise one morning and bowed to the ground, as was his habit on being admitted to her presence. He had come about some charity—a shopkeeper for whom the marquise was surety; first he transacted this business; it was only on rising to go that he inquired:

"You have good news of Monsieur Louis, madame la marquise?"

Yes, madame had good news of her son.

"I am truly glad to hear it. He is enjoying himself in the country? Ah, yes! He does not say how?"

"Speak out at once and tell me all about it," said Madame de Parfondrieu, sitting up in her high-backed chair.

"But, madame——"

"Chauveau, do you think by this time I do not know your face and your manner? What have you heard?"

"Nothing of any serious importance, madame la marquise. With an ordinary woman it would not be important at all. But you—you are so different from other women. On

some subjects you have such peculiar ideas, superior ideas, I do not deny it, but still——”

“I understand. It has come at last. Of course I knew it must come,” interrupted Madame de Parfondrieu in much agitation. “God! I had an idea it would never come, but that was absurd, and I knew it was absurd! Of course. I know men, I—what is the name of the girl?”

“Léonie Dassier, the steward’s daughter. But, dear madame la marquise, permit me; I fear you exaggerate. Let me tell you the facts of a harmless flirtation, at least——”

The mother put up her hand. “No, forgive me,” she said. “My dear Chauveau, I must have the particulars only from my son.”

“So be it, but try not to judge them as his mother——”

She looked the old man in the eyes. “I have tried all my life,” she said, “to make my son different from other men. And now see, he is like other men.”

“It would be wrong in you to be angry with him for that.”

“Madame de Parfondrieu is not angry, my friend. His mother is angry. Can a mother be angry with her son? I do not think so. I suppose I am not angry.” The tears poured down her cheeks.

He left her. She dried her tears, and her face grew hard.

And she sent a telegram within an hour:

"Return immediately! Your mother."

Immediately Louis returned. He had never known her ill. He thought she must be dying. "No," said the old servant, "madame la marquise was but slightly indisposed; she expected Monsieur Louis in her sitting-room." As soon as he entered, she accosted him:

"What have you done to Léonie Dasier?"

"Ah! you know, then?" he cried, his whole face lighting up. "I am delighted! I prayed my cousin Eugenia to write to you, but I did not think she intended to do it."

"She has written," said the marquise severely, "to Antoine Chauveau, I presume. Louis, my whole life has been devoted to teaching you that the hearts of women are not the playthings of men. Fool that I was to believe that my son at least would be pure!"

"Maman, what dost thou mean?"

"Oh, I know the conventional reasoning! You shall not hold it to me, Louis. You had no right to approach this girl with your courtesies, not intending to marry her!"

"But of course I intend to marry her!"

How could my cousin Eugenia say not? She is a stupid woman; I did not know she was a wicked one. I told her——”

“You—intend—to—marry—this girl?”

“Mother, I shall never love any one else. Of course it is not quite the marriage either you or I could have wished. I knew you would be vexed, so I asked my cousin to prepare you. But, mother, you see it is not so bad as you fancied. How *could* you think that I, *your* son, had asked a girl to marry me, not meaning it?”

“You have asked her to marry you?”

“Yes; mother, what *have* they written? Had I but written at once; I am punished for my cowardice. Ah, mother, how must you have suffered, to doubt of your son!”

She rose and stood looking at him. His blue eyes filled with her own. “*Tu es bête,*” she said. “Thank God! thou art only that.” As she passed him she read in his silent face, like a flash, the reminiscence that she had been a *Demoiselle Breluchon*.

In the evening she told him abruptly that she had written for this girl to come and see her. Léonie spent a day or two with madame la marquise. The girl was a passionate southern beauty, with burning lips and eyes—all vibration and sweetness and anger and impulse: a caress and a sting.

When she was gone Madame de Parfondrieu recalled her son.

"You will be wretched with that girl," she said.

"I have never loved a woman before," he replied.

"She is not at all the wife for you. I do not believe she is a good girl."

"Mother, how dare you say that?"

"I say it with a bleeding heart. I do not believe she is a good girl."

"I shall never love another woman again."

"Pshaw, you will love many women!"

He bit his lip, trembling.

"Some day you will come to me and curse this hour!"

"Nay, I shall not curse it. Though it has taught me that my mother can be unjust."

"So marry whomsoever thou wilt, my son. See, one can marry but once. A second marriage is no marriage. And most men and women never marry at all!"

"I do not understand what you mean, mother."

"We go to church," she said, speaking to herself, "and then we live together."

"But I," he exclaimed triumphantly, "love Léonie!"

Therefore they were married—a handsome couple, devoted, delighted, a nine days' scan-

dal. Then people talked about something else, and the Marquise Douairière set herself to make head or tail of her daughter-in-law.

Léonie's idea was to live in the great world and play the *grande dame*, a rôle for which she considered herself admirably fitted. Madame de Parfondrieu's aspiration was to keep her hidden away at Mauvry-les-Tours, for the present at any rate. The diversities of opinion between the ladies, the complications, the contradictions, the amiable dissensions, these supplied tittle-tattle for a hundred tea tables and smoking rooms. Such things leak out. Many a good story reached us which now it would be bad taste to repeat, for a great catastrophe sweeps the smiles from the most satirical faces. A year elapsed before we were allowed to see the *Marquise en Percale*, as some punster had dubbed her.

When she came among us she looked bored, but with the dangerous look of a bored woman who wants to be amused. Her eyes were full of slumbrous passion and arrogance and discontent. The old marchioness was much to the front; the young people were her guests in her big "hôtel," drove in her carriages, sat through her long clerical receptions. But every one could see that Louis at any rate worshipped his beautiful wife. "She is charming, but she wants educating,"

said one of the worst men I have known. "I imagine she is highly educable."

They disappeared again for some months. The health of the old marquise broke down, and they went off to one of the horrible watering places—where nobody but sick people go; where the doctors as well as the patients believe in the waters. When they came back again everybody, except the husband and mother, soon knew what the mother usually knows first and the husband last.

On an evening in November, a raw and gusty evening, about tea time, a cab stopped in front of a dingy house in a by-street. A veiled female figure emerged from the vehicle, told the coachman to wait, gave a name to the concierge and slowly ascended the staircase. A tall and majestic figure, of sure foot and slow, conscious carriage. At the entrance to an apartment on the second floor a slight parley, almost an altercation, ensued. A door in the passage slipped open, a woman looked out.

"See, it is thou!" said Madame de Parfondrieu to the woman.

"I would not let her pass," explained the little maid triumphantly. But Madame de Parfondrieu closed the door of the brilliantly lighted drawing-room.

"If that man comes, have the goodness

to say you are momentarily engaged," she said, with a swift glance round. "You are expecting him? I had understood he was seldom as early as this!" She sank into a chair. "Have the goodness, I beg of you, to give your order," she said, and when Léonie had obeyed:

"He keeps you waiting!" said the old woman in deepest accents of scorn. Léonie did not answer. There was silence.

"I had thought," began Madame de Parfondrieu presently, painfully steadying her voice, "that such women did not exist. You will laugh at me, I suppose, for a stupid old woman. I—I had believed there were unmarried women who fell, but married women—no! I had thought these were only in comedy. I ask myself"—her eyes vaguely sought her daughter-in-law's face—"is this thing of frequent occurrence? I wonder—" She rose, and with an exceeding bitter cry: "My God, what does it matter? It has happened to my son!"

"Hush, hush!" interrupted Léonie, suddenly looking up from the couch on which she had sunk.

"Ah, true! You fear exposure! Some one might hear. That is the one thing they dread, those women, is it not?—exposure!"

"I do not know. Do not ask me; I know

nothing," said Léonie, once more dropping her face on her hands.

"Ah, madame, you know too much, far too much," replied the marquise. "It is I who can do nothing, say nothing. I do not understand. I could have wept with you, if needs were, the errors of my son—wept tears of my heart's blood. Often have I pictured the thing to myself, have dreaded it, have prayed over it daily; in my littleness of faith, almost expecting it! But *this!* Never have I prayed about it; never have I given it a thought. And it has come upon me. You and I, madame, we have to face it together."

"What do you mean?" asked Léonie, her head uplifted, a quick flash of hope across her hot eyes.

"My son——"

"You will not tell him?"

For all reply Madame de Parfondrieu burst into passionate weeping.

A ring was heard in the hall. The maid went to open. Steps—a man's voice—a lengthy discussion—the two women held their breaths to listen—then the hall door closed with a bang and the little maid walked in, unannounced, with a defiant look at the visitor.

"Monsieur will return to-morrow, unless

I summon him from the café in ten minutes," she said. "Monsieur was very cross."

"Go, then, away," exclaimed Léonie with a wave of the hand. The little maid departed pouting.

Madame de Parfondrieu rose, steadying herself. "You would have no scandal? I understand, *marquise*," she said. "You would remain as you are. Yes, that would be very pleasant. And you think, woman, that my son could continue to live with you—that I—that you? No, God is my witness, I love my son too truly for that!"

"I understand," said Léonie in a low voice.

Her mother-in-law stood looking at her.

"Yes, I understand," repeated the other woman, staring in front of her, her chin in her hand. "But do you also understand me? It is true, as you say, the wrong I have done Louis is beyond redress. And it would not be possible that you and I should live side by side, knowing what we know. Nor should I wish it. I have often thought that it would come, and that the end of this would be the end of all. But, then, do you also understand why it came? I am not of your race, I—not of your rank, not of your surroundings. And I am of the South! Your house has been a hell to me; I was wretched, utterly wretched,

and dully desperate, and forlorn. Oh, I know he loved me!" She rose, with hands upheld above her brow. "Don't tell me that! I know it—I know it! That, somehow, I could not tell you how, has been the most awful thing of all! He loved me! I loved him! I was wretched! God, had I *not* loved him I could have understood how wretched I was!"

Madame de Parfondrieu stood still.

"I pity you deeply," she said.

"I do not want your pity, madame, for you can not pity me aright. Of me you can understand nothing, nor I of you. Well, it is over. It has been terrible. I would not live through it again. Nor is that necessary. Adieu, madame. Do not tell Louis. Invent some story of my disappearance. He loved me. Leave him my memory. He will marry again, some one of his own surroundings. His cousin, whom you wanted him to marry. Let him marry her."

"What! you tell me to my face that you will continue this connection?"

"No!" She swept up her blazing eyes to meet the other's gaze. "Even in your hideous religion your son will be able honestly to marry again! Now, go!"

The old dowager drew her mantle around her, quivering under the words.

"It is the best thing you can do," she said

hesitatingly. "There is nothing else left you. The best thing. The only thing." She spoke lingeringly, as if thinking out this project of voluntary, inevitable self-retribution. Still uncertain, she took a step forward.

"Nay, go," said Léonie, pointing. And without any word of further explanation Madame de Parfondrieu quitted the room. Neither she nor her daughter-in-law had anything left to say to each other.

The little maid showed the grand old lady out with an ill-repressed sniff of spiteful contempt. Immediately after the door had closed she ran to her mistress.

"Madame, shall I hurry and fetch him? The ten minutes are over, it is true; but, ah me! he will have waited twenty; he was angry, very angry, but he is waiting, never fear! I will run to the café; I will fetch him."

Her mistress, lying with her face hid in the sofa cushions, did not move.

"Madame, do not cry, I entreat you. It is not worth while. Old women are always nasty to young ones—my grandmother is cruel—it is their way of regretting the youth and the loves that are gone."

Léonie lifted a hot head. "I was not crying, girl," she said. "I—I believe I was praying. No, we will not call him to-night. I am very tired; I shall go to bed. Give me

the little pink box with the sleeping powders. They are only sleeping powders, mind you. Monsieur Paul is a bad man. You must not let him make love to you—ever—do you hear?”

“I! madame. Fie! does madame think I could do her such treachery? Surely, I have not merited——”

“You are a faithful girl, Suzon. I was thinking of the future. Get me the box. They are only sleeping powders, mind you; when one is too hot and feverish, when one burns, they put you to sleep. To sleep.”

Meanwhile Madame de Parfondrieu in the cab sat expecting the tears that did not come. In truth, her brain was too busy with thoughts of what would happen next.

That this creature should pass out of their lives was of course the only thing possible; there could be no further intercourse between them, however much either might desire it; when a crystal is broken you throw it away. Neither could desire it. If this woman should consider self-annihilation the only fitting, the only possible termination to her career—for Madame de Parfondrieu had well understood Léonie’s meaning—who was she, Madame de Parfondrieu, to advise otherwise, to dissuade from a step which, however wrong in itself, did indeed seem the only possible issue.

There are cases in which suicide is only another form of self-execution. The culprit is his own judge. Madame de Parfondrieu had even a text ready out of the Bible: "Ye, then, if ye would but judge yourselves, ye should not be judged." She did not quote it literally; anyhow, once remembered it fitted admirably into her thoughts. And Louis would be free.

She sent away the cab and crept back into her own house. As soon as she crossed the threshold, a great agitation befell her. Her son was here in his room, probably writing or reading a little before it was time to dress for dinner. She must go to him, then, and tell all. But she dared not. Her knees knocked together. She sat down in an upstairs hall.

As for Léonie's appeal to remain sacred in her husband's memory, the mother-in-law ignored it. She would go to her son, and now that this three years' madness had passed out of his life, she would heal the wound once for all, immediately by cauterizing this wound that gaped between him and herself. What matter if healing, being healing, hurts? She rose, and dragging herself to her son's room, hurriedly entered.

He was standing by the lamp which, under a gigantic yellow shade, illuminated his writ-

ing table. The whole room was full of golden light. A couple of envelopes, a number of photographs lay in a little heap beside the lamp. He turned with suppressed annoyance, for he detested his mother's habit of entering without a knock.

"The proofs have come from Barretti's," he said. "I think they are very good. Look, mother, they are very good."

She drew near. Three large boudoir photographs of her daughter-in-law were spread out on the table. He arranged them, propping them carefully, under the full light of the lamp. They were showy portraits in evening dress, with a fur cloak, flowers, and jewels; very handsome, a little vulgar, a little "loud"—exceedingly like.

"They are good; I am so glad they are good," he repeated. She wondered for whom *she* had had them made.

"Don't you think they are good?" he went on. "Say they are good. Every one must think so, maman."

"I do not like these new-fangled photos," she answered. "Louis, there is something else I would speak of to you."

"Business? Ah! dear mother, let it wait for ten minutes. There is always business. You like it, I believe. I detest it. Let me enjoy, for a few seconds, my portraits. Nay,

I am willing to do business of all kinds, and even to knit socks for the poor. Léonie told me yesterday she was going to try to be good to the poor. It is hard. And it is not very pleasant. Dear creature, she does all that she can—all that she can."

The mother recoiled before the implied reproof of these words. Suddenly Louis dropped upon his knees, and drawing one of the photos toward him passionately, repeatedly kissed the impassively smiling face.

"Louis!" The old woman's heart failed within her at the agony that broke through her voice.

"I know you think I exaggerate. But, mother," he rose, "you can not understand, you will never understand what Léonie is to me. I am different from other men as you have known them. I am different even—forgive me, you have never told me anything, but I am a man, I think I have understood—different from my own father. To some few men one love is sufficient; they would have no room in their lives for more. Léonie fills my whole existence; I have nothing to remember, nothing to forget. She is the whole of my love-life. I adore her. That I should do in any case. But I thank God"—his voice shook—"for having made her worthy of all the adoration my heart can bestow."

"You believe much in women, my son," said the dowager bitterly from behind him. He turned quickly. "I know little of women," he said. "I believe in my mother and my wife."

"And supposing either were faithless?"

He smiled. "I should believe in them still."

"You mock me, Louis. Supposing your wife were faithless?"

"It is you who mock me, my mother. There are things—ah! pardon—that one should not say even in jest. You do not like Léonie as much as I should wish. I am very sorry. It is the one disturbance of my life. I do not think she is very happy. I love her all the more on that account. She is faithful and loyal and true, and even were she not——"

"Well—were she not?"

"It is an absurdity, mother; but—well, then the fault would be mine."

"Mine."

"I say mine, not yours. It is unthinkable; I do not know why you speak like this—but, admitting the supposition, yes, the fault would be mine. It is I who have brought her here. I who have made her unhappy——"

"Unhappy!"

"Not that I could help it, perhaps, and yet I do not know. I owe her a great reparation." He took up one of the photos as if he would have kissed it, but manfully put it down.

"Pauvrette!" he said.

"Your love," she burst out impetuously, trembling from head to foot; "your love is the love of a fool!"

"Better than that of a rogue," he answered; "and a man's love is always one or the other."

"And without this plaything you would die?"

"Mother, what ails you to-night? You are terrible! Die?—no. If God took my wife from me—he alone could do it—I should live, praying daily for death. I should live and try to do my duty. He would see into my heart; he would forgive the prayer."

"And I, then, am nothing!" The cry rang against the walls. She did not hear his answer; she heard nothing but the cry echoing, re-echoing through long galleries of lonely thought. She had hastened to the door. She was fumbling to find the lock.

"I am tired," she said. "It wants nearly an hour to dinner. I am going to lie down."

"Do that," he answered soothingly. "You are not yourself. I will go and show

these to Léonie. She was anxious to have them."

"Léonie is not at home," sharply exclaimed Madame de Parfondrieu.

"Not at home? It is surely getting late. Good Heavens, if something has befallen her!"

"No, no; she will be in presently. Keep your photographs. In half an hour you will be able to show her them, my son." She closed the door upon him; she ran downstairs as if she were not old and feeble. She sent her astonished hall-porter for a cab. Madame la marquise in a cab! He had never known such a thing to happen before. "I have forgotten a commission," she said, "for a poor woman. It is close by. I shall only be twenty minutes. No, nobody need go with me. It is unnecessary. Drive on!" She gave the cabman the address a little later; she promised him five francs if he drove faster than he could.

Hardly waiting for the inevitable explanations, she flew up to the second story and rang. "Hush! madame sleeps," said the angry Suzon.

A hideous sickness took possession of Madame de Parfondrieu. "I must see your mistress at all costs," she made answer. "If she is still here, I must see her—her happi-

ness, her very life depends on it—if she is not, tell me instantly where she is gone!”

“She is here,” said the girl, impressed by the great lady’s manner.

“If you love her——”

“If I—? I adore her. She is the best mistress on earth,” said Suzon. “It is you who are a wicked woman, and——”

“Possibly. God, I do not deny it! If you love her, then, instantly admit me. A moment’s delay may mean death!”

The girl shrank aside. Madame de Parfondrieu passed hurriedly into the sitting-room and so on, through the half-open door, into the bed-chamber beyond. Both rooms were brilliantly lighted. On the bed, in the full light and warmth, Léonie lay stretched out. She was in white undress, the black masses of hair all about her. The long lashes lay dark on the dusk of her cheeks.

Madame de Parfondrieu bent over her and ran back. “A doctor!” she cried; “a doctor instantly—a doctor!” Suzon, who was close behind her, burst out crying and rushed downstairs.

When the little maid returned from sending the concierge she found Madame de Parfondrieu pacing the two rooms in a fever of agitation. There was lace about the old lady’s

toilet; it hung in shreds between her fingers and on the floor.

Suzon stopped for a moment and stared at her. Then the girl burst out: "I had forgotten. When madame went to bed to-night she was melancholy, and she said to me: 'Suzon, if by any chance you should meet again the lady who was here to-night you must tell her I forgive her. Remember that,' she said, 'it is all—just to tell her I forgive her.'" She brushed past the old marquise and stooped beside the bed. Then, facing round, with a torrent of tears: "But I shall never forgive you! What came you here for, making her wretched? You, what are you, old and ugly, to grudge other people their happiness?" and, to the other's horrified amazement, she burst out into a flow of the vilest gutter epithets, heaping up insult and indecent abuse with the swift ease of a child of the purlieus. The marchioness stood silent, drenched under a downpour of filth!

Louis de Parfondrieu knows nothing. It has been necessary, therefore, here to alter his name. He lives almost entirely with his mother at the place which in these pages has been called Mauvry-les-Tours. Their charities are immense; they build

churches, convents, asylums, schools for girls. The only point of dispute between them is that he always wants to dedicate each new institution to the memory of Léonie.

LITTLE MARY.

MARY BATES lived in Parade Gardens, Harrogate. For aught I know she lives there still. Her story was told me by her most intimate friend, who was English governess to my sister's children. Of course, the governess ought not to have told it, but for what else, may I ask, are a woman's female friends?

Mary Bates lived with her widowed mother and "invalid" sister in Parade Gardens, Harrogate. Her father had been an officer and a gentleman, one of the Christian heroes of the Mutiny, and that fact was the lasting satisfaction of his younger daughter's life. She had never known him—he had died in India—but her loyalty treasured every relic and legend that had gathered round his name.

Mother and daughters dwelled in the trimmest of twenty-four trim little houses. There was something in the fall of the muslin curtains and in the shine of the polished knocker that immediately told you a very great deal about the middle-aged people in-

side. Nobody could associate youth with that house, or movement of any kind; the solemn maid who answered the bell looked twice her count of years—if, indeed, she still kept count of them. As a matter of fact, she was probably twenty-five. But then, Mary herself was once eight-and-twenty; however, she had been born older than that.

She was eight-and-twenty at the time of her great romance.

Mother and daughters had an annual income of five hundred pounds. They were therefore equally removed from poverty and from affluence.

"Mine is the desire of the Psalmist," said old Mrs. Bates. She always said it when comparing with people who had less. "Two maids is better than one, and still better than four." That is the sort of sentence which, once wedged into the head of an old person like Mrs. Bates, gets taken out and replaced half a dozen times a day.

The captain's widow was not a particularly attractive old lady to see much of. She had never had many ideas even in her best days, and now most of them were gone. Her chief pleasure, in her girlhood and early married life, had been her pink-and-white complexion, her doll-like good looks; she had simpered, and one or two delightful young subalterns

had paid her harmless attentions. When she remembered these—alack, so often!—she could simper still. Her health was bad—she was over eighty—she suffered from an objectionable, very loose cough. Little Mary preserved her in cotton wool, else had she been dead a dozen years ago. It was Mary's particular pride that she kept her tottery old mother "nice."

"The world is terribly wicked," old Mrs. Bates would say, sitting white and spruce in her armchair by the window, while little Mary, half dead with all the dressing and fussing, read out scraps of news from the Daily Telegraph. "I imagine, do you know, it is worse than when I was as young as you!"

"Oh, mother!" protested the daughter, "just think of all the good work that's done!"

"Good work!—what work, pray? We never had a servant could sew like my mother's Susan Jane!"

"I was thinking of charity," softly said little Mary. "Oh, you mean philanthropics!" snorted Mrs. Bates.

A personage little disturbed by the rising waves of altruism was Louisa. This lady of some thirty russet autumns was one of those serenely happy mortals (in theory, of course, we deeply pity them) who never swerve for

any one's sake from the path of self-indulgence. She possessed that not uncommon constitution which permits its owner to do exactly what it likes to do, neither more nor less. She could spend a whole day at a red-hot picnic, walking for miles; a message around the corner might at any time bring on a real sick headache. She could produce swellings and pains *ad libitum*, not under the control of her will, but as a spontaneous outcome of "nerves." She had even been known to go blind for ten days through her eyelids refusing to lift. They went up like shutters when the Seventeenth Lancers came to Leeds at the time of the great crisis in the wool trade. On the whole, however, she lived content, if only she could have her daily round of little pleasures, little toilet novelties, little worries, little grumblings, and little ailments—all that she asked for was ceaseless, devoted, unrepining labour on the part of little Mary. She got it. There were moments, of course, when Louisa had to wait because Mrs. Bates was calling. These were the troubled times in little Mary's existence. Otherwise the latter struggled placidly on against overwhelming pressure, trying not to feel how much the feeblest effort exhausted her. It was impossible for Louisa to get up early or stay up late (unless for a picnic or party); Mary rose

little after the servants, but then they had retired to rest a couple of hours before her. The worst of it was that Mary disapproved of all Louisa's innocent diversions—the theatre, the popular concerts, an occasional night at the music hall. These things little Mary considered sinful, and so would not have accompanied her sister, whom she could not accompany in any case, as Mrs. Bates objected to being left alone. Nevertheless, here was a standing grievance for Louisa, and, in fact, on one occasion she had taken such vehement umbrage that she left off speaking to Mary at all, excepting through their mother. For more than seven years this state of things continued—it is easier far to start on such a track than to turn back when well started—but as Mrs. Bates grew deafer the complications it occasioned constantly increased.

“Ma!” cried Louisa. (How Mary used to dread that reiterated word!) “Ma, please tell Mary that I shan't be home till late to-night.”

“How late?” asked Mary quietly.

“Ma, can I have the latch-key?”

“I don't think it shows a bit,” replied Mrs. Bates, dozing over the illustrated *Pilgrim's Progress* which Mary made her “read.”

“What doesn't show?” cried Louisa.

"The patch on your jacket. I think Mary's sewed it very nicely."

"I wasn't talking of patches! May I have the latch-key?"

"Mother doesn't like the door left unlocked," said little Mary, threading her needle.

"Ma, will you please tell Mary I can't be back before past eleven. There's an entertainment in the schoolroom; the new curate's coming."

"But who will see you home?" asked Mary.

"Ma, the new curate has rooms in Victoria Place."

"Louisa, do you know I think your conduct wicked?" suddenly began little Mary, two bright spots on her sallow cheeks.

Louisa, shaking her dusty ringlets, pretended not to hear.

"You have gone on like this for more than seven years," hurried on little Mary, her voice very near a breakdown. "I have told you before, Louisa, I am sure it is very wrong of you. Some day you will be sorry—yes, sorry for your wickedness."

Louisa got up and went round to her mother's deafest ear. "Ma!" she shouted; "tell Mary to leave off, will you? She's calling me names."

"La, surely not!" exclaimed Mrs. Bates, almost dropping Bunyan. "I'm sure you're mistaken, Louisa! It must be Bible texts!"

Little Mary, unable as are most good-natured people to distinguish between righteous indignation and naughty temper, went up to her dark room and cried.

When she came down again Louisa had departed, leaving directions that she would like a cup of tea on her return, "Which of course you will not have made," said Mrs. Bates. "The servants, as I tell Louisa, have a right to their night's rest. Louisa's demands upon our patience are sometimes too utterly absurd." Little Mary agreed, and did not order the tea. She penitently made it herself. But first she spent the whole long evening listening to Mrs. Bates's perennial tales of (personal) Indian conquest and putting in the required replies. Little Mary's conversations with her mother were like games of cup and ball.

Then she helped the shaky old lady to bed, and kept her from breaking her neck and a dozen less important objects. The nightly undressing, hair-dressing, redressing lasted more than an hour. "I like it," gasped little Mary.

Mrs. Bates having groaned herself to sleep—snores were even sweet music to little

Mary—her daughter wandered downstairs, looked after the tea, and sat herself down to expectant needlework. It had always been Mary's dearest aspiration to possess a Sunday class of her very own—a very hopeless aspiration, for Mrs. Bates required continuous comforting during the dreary Sunday afternoons. "I never have time somehow," sighed miserable little Mary, "to do anything for any one else!" Yet she could not help feeling annoyed when Louisa pointed out the same fact to her.

Louisa greatly enjoyed the Sunday school—not the long, dull hour of lesson, but all the before and after, and the curate's weekly preparation class. The curate called her his right hand.

"Yes, you are my right hand, dear Miss Bates," he was saying, as they walked back together on that foggy night. "Positively my right hand. I can not imagine what I should do without you."

"Without me!" echoed Louisa.

"Yes, without you."

"Oh! you don't want me," said Louisa coyly.

"Every hour of the—Sunday," replied the curate.

"Come in and have a cup of tea," said Louisa suddenly.

"At this hour of night, my dear Miss Bates?"

"Oh! my sister promised, if I was good, I should have some tea on returning."

"And you're sure you have been good?"

"Haven't I?" she turned archly in the doorway.

"Very, very good."

"This is my sister Mary. Mr. Brass."

The young curate bowed. He was not a bad-looking young fellow, but too lanky everywhere. He was bright and honest and earnest, but he "enjoyed his tea."

"Thank you; with pleasure," he said, when Mary refilled the cups. "And can you not be persuaded," he said, "to join in our good work?"

"Oh! teaching isn't in Mary's line," put in Louisa hastily.

"I'm too young," said Mary, laughing, but not without a touch of spirit. Louisa scowled.

"Surely," continued the curate, "the leading the youthful lambs in the——"

"Mother needs a deal of care," said Mary. Her eyes met the young man's, and suddenly he understood it all. "I may come and call some afternoon?" he said, rising to depart. "Come and call upon your mother, may I not?"

"We shall be delighted," said Louisa. Little Mary's eyes were on the tea-cups. As soon as the front door had closed on Mr. Brass, Louisa marched straight past her sister, turned back on the staircase, said "Minx!" and went to bed.

"Well, she's spoken to me at any rate," reflected little Mary, as she locked up and put out the lights.

The curate on his way home considered that Louisa possessed a sort of florid handsomeness, but that Mary had gentle eyes. He pondered over this fact and drew conclusions. For every man some sort of woman's eyes prove irresistible. It all depends, as in the case of Augustus and Cleopatra, upon his meeting with the fatal sort!

The curate had long been troubled with a growing weight of loneliness. In fact, he was looking for a wife. He disliked his comfortable rooms in Victoria Place, and had begun very cautiously to flirt a little here and there. He had paid some small attention to Louisa. Needless to say, he was not a brilliant *parti*; still he possessed a couple of hundred a year in addition to his stipend. And he was eminently worthy. He was a total abstainer.

But he also formed the boys of his Bible class into a cricket club.

In expectation of possible developments, he called frequently on the Bateses, and was amiable (but he could not have been otherwise) to all three ladies. He listened to Mrs. Bates's tales of Indian life, inquired frequently after her only son (a civil engineer in London) and his wife and children (especially Polly, little Mary's goddaughter—the endlessly witty, amusing inexhaustible Polly); he even read Mrs. Bates asleep out of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. And then he talked on about Polly—a subject which never wearied little Mary, until:

“Ma,” exclaimed the exasperated Louisa, starting Mrs. Bates awake, “don't you think Mr. Brass has had more than enough of the babblings of a child of five!”

Little Mary coloured. “I love children,” said Eric Brass.

“All good men do,” said little Mary softly. “You flirt!” gasped Louisa between her teeth, and began to talk very loud about the coming bazar.

For a big bazar was approaching, filling for the moment the lives of all the young ladies connected with the parish of St. Jude's. Most people will remember the great work undertaken in the later eighties by the noble-hearted and energetic Bishop of the Carribees, when that prelate alarmed by the rapid physi-

cal degeneration of his converts since Christianity had deprived them of their customary food, instituted—himself, it is hardly necessary to say, an enthusiastic cyclist—the great Carribee Cycling Movement in all the parishes of his island diocese. The name “Muscular Christians” had not then become a by-word, yet the bishop experienced the greatest difficulty in popularizing not only the term itself, but still more the idea it conveys, for “muscular” in Carribee covers the same conception as “sinewy,” and “sinewy” again is not distinguishable from “tough,” which later idea very naturally suggests to this primitive people unpleasant associations, as connected with the human frame. Ultimately, however, British pluck and persistency conquered; cycling in native costume over the coral reefs and under the spicy breezes became the fashionable pastime, and also a condition for parish relief. Immense funds were required for the purchase of thousands of “safeties” (these were just coming in); a great central committee, under the management of the well-known Mrs. Russell and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Brisbane Bottom, organized the vast labour of National Appeal. Unfortunately, it was before the time when the celebrated Piccaninny Sauce had enriched the South Sea bishopric with the wealth of Hol-

loway and Bovril combined. At the time of the Harrogate fête and sale three thousand four hundred and seventy-three bicycles still remained unsubscribed for. That cipher, however, it must be admitted, brought down the age of eligible applicants to six. And to everybody who cared for the welfare of his kind, and to everybody who didn't circulars were forwarded with the motto:

"Through the shadow of the globe we wheel into the
younger day,
Send us fifteen pounds from Europe for a cycle in
Cathay."

Harrogate, among other places, went off its head. The vicar of St. Jude's took command of the movement and safely guided it into a bazar. All his curates and helpers he marshalled around him, and bade them play up to Mammon and cut away his purse while he danced.

Eric Brass brought the news to the household in Parade Gardens, and easily "enthused" the two Miss Bateses. But a few days later a rumour spread that one of the chief attractions of the show would be a musical bicycle ride by young ladies in bloomers. So long ago are the later eighties! Then both the spinsters' faces lengthened to their waists. Louisa's because she could not ride, and

Mary's because she considered such doings improper.

"But it is the costume of Rebecca and Rachel," pleaded the curate; "the dress of the women of the East."

"Would you have us wear the costume of Eve?" leaped to little Mary's lips. But she only said: "And what, Mr. Brass, is to be your work?" For that was little Mary's greatest triumph: the keeping a natural quick wit and sharp tongue muffled up in charity and righteousness.

"The tea stall," he answered, beaming; "and I expect both you ladies to help me. For once, Mrs. Bates," he bawled, "I trust you will make an exception——"

But Mrs. Bates, who could hear when necessary, immediately assumed what Louisa called her "cry-baby" mood and querulously lamented the helplessness of old age. "I'm a poor, useless old woman," she mourned; "time was when I could have made all the tea—aye, and sold it to officers."

"The bloomers will attract officers," said the curate recklessly.

"I am the eldest," said Louisa.

"You are," said Mary and smiled.

"Ma, don't you think," cried Louisa, "that Mary's too young to sell tea by herself in a crowded hall?"

"If I could only get one of you," suggested the curate timidly. "I was thinking of asking Mrs. Devereux Smith and her two little daughters——"

"Oh!" said Louisa; "I don't like Mrs. Smith alias Devereux."

Little Mary, with whom that remark had originated, bit her lip.

"But I must go to the sale!" cried Louisa, and viciously slapped down a paper-knife on the Christian World.

Mrs. Bates sat up with sudden energy. "You must draw lots, my dears," she said, feeling herself to be very unselfish.

The curate jumped at the idea, bore down all Mary's faint opposition, hurriedly presented his two hands to Louisa: "Which will you have?" he cried. "One of these is you and the other Miss Mary!" "The right," gasped Louisa. "You've lost—'tis Miss Mary!" said the curate.

"Ma," shrieked Louisa, "don't you think Mary's far too——"

"No; as I have won I shall go," remarked Mary.

"Oh! do by all means," retorted Louisa (for she now occasionally spoke to her sister when the curate was present, "lest the man should find out"). "And remember to be rude to Mrs. Smith!" Little Mary made no

answer. She set herself almost immediately to prepare a smart costume for the important occasion, and held many a delightfully exhaustive conference with the curate about all the requirements of their stall. The curate was painfully particular regarding the quality of the tea; he wrote to a dozen addresses. Louisa, who possessed her soul in almost distressing patience, confined herself to the casually repeated remark that, anyhow, Mary's tea was bound to be undrinkable.

So the much-expected event approached. In fact, it was only one day off, when the telegram came from London.

Eric Brass had called on the Tuesday afternoon, wearing a somewhat flushed and frowning countenance.

Mrs. Devereux Smith is in bed with the influenza!" he cried. "It does not really matter. Her two little girls will come."

"Ma!" shouted Louisa.

Mary agreed there was nothing to be done. Louisa slipped out of the room, and appeared no more till tea time. Then she was silent—except that twice she remarked:

"Ma, your cough's much better. Ma, it's as good as gone."

"Yes, I think you really are much better," said little Mary. She had just said it over again on the Wednesday morning, sitting by

her mother—the morning of the day preceding the bazar—when the housemaid brought in the telegram.

“For me?” cried little Mary in astonishment. She opened the missive and read:

“Come at once. Polly ill.”

“There’s no signature,” said little Mary. The paper dropped from her hand. Her voice shook. There were tears in her eyes. “I had better go,” she said steadily. And that very afternoon she went, having written a hurried note of hot apology to the curate.

But, strangely enough, the curate was at the station, as it happened he must travel by the same train to Ripon. What! had he not mentioned it yesterday? He supposed he must have forgotten it.

Little Mary was in a great flutter of sorrow and nervousness. She had left her mother ailing, though not seriously, as Louisa had repeatedly pointed out. She felt certain that her godchild, before such a summons would be sent from London, must lie at the point of death. She hardly expected to see Polly alive; she in no case expected to see her restored. Mary’s was a brave nature, but it never could be called a hopeful one.

She sat in the railway compartment, alone

with the curate, looking steadfastly out, a gray mist before her eyes. And presently she began to talk for the sake of not feeling the silence.

She expressed her great regret at breaking her promise to help him with to-morrow's show. "She was as bad as Mrs. Smith," she said, smiling; as bad as Mrs. Devereux Smith, and without Mrs. Devereux Smith's excuse. But never mind, he would have a far better helpmate in Louisa. Yes, yes; they had managed about Louisa; for once Jane must take care of her mistress. They could not desert him altogether; and, after all, she smiled again, a little archly, "Louisa——"

"True, true; but I want to speak of something else," he said.

She looked at him, not without surprise, and began about the good work out yonder—in the Carribean Islands. She waxed eloquent with nervous feminine enthusiasm about the great pioneer of progress, the strong-hearted and strong-limbed apostle.

"Yes; oh! yes," said Eric Brass, twirling his wide-awake between his long legs; "but I should like to speak of something else!"

She opened her mild eyes wider; the corners of her sweet mouth twitched. "Well?" she said, "let us talk about my poor niece Polly. I fear she is very ill, poor child. She

is such a dear little creature; you can not imagine, Mr. Brass——”

“No!” he cried, maddened at the thought that, at any moment, a stoppage might end their *tête-à-tête*, “but I wish you would allow me to speak of something else.”

“Allow you!” she cried—the tears sank away in her voice, and she laughed outright.

“Any subject you like, Mr. Brass; but please choose for yourself! You’re the most difficult man in the world to please, or my name isn’t Mary Bates!”

“I wish it were something else,” he said, his face all crimson, and then he asked her to marry him.

When she answered at last, she said very softly: “I thought it was Louisa.”

The curate could not deny that at first he had paid some slight attention to Louisa, but since he had got to know Mary well he had made up his mind to marry Mary.

When she answered, after a still longer wait, she said more softly still: “And Louisa thought it was she.”

The curate looked, as men do, a little guilty and a great deal more annoyed.

“Louisa thinks it is she,” continued little Mary tremulously; “and, besides, you mustn’t look at me, Mr. Brass. I—I shall *never* marry.

I can not leave my mother. And—and, if at any time, my mother—I—I could never leave Louisa. Mother and Louisa are quite incapable of looking after themselves. You could hardly believe how much of the home work devolves on me. It sounds like praising oneself—I should say it to no one else—but I can't be missed at home. Men have no conception of such things, but my mission is, I think, at home, Mr. Brass; every one must do his own life-work, mustn't he? "

" Yes, and take up his cross," he answered savagely.

" And take up his cross," admitted Mary, as cheerfully as she could, " and try to discover the most comfortable manner of carrying it. But Louisa——" Then for the rest of their common journey she praised Louisa, truthfully putting forward all the bright points she had carefully hunted up during nearly twenty years. She pitied Louisa deeply at this moment, for she knew that Louisa's dreams of the future were built upon Eric Brass. So she eagerly, though indirectly, pleaded her sister's cause, and when the curate left the train it was under the conviction that he could not, unless he were the vilest of mortals, break his faith to so estimable a spinster as poor Louisa Bates. " I am sure she likes you very much," said Mary, holding his

hand in parting. "Of course I can say no more."

"She has told you?" asked the curate, a little ruefully.

Again Mary could not suppress an overbrimful smile. "Not exactly," she answered. "Louisa does not speak much to me about such things. But I can guess a good deal. Do you know, Mr. Brass, I fear you are partial to flirting!"

The curate's soul turned faint within him. "I would wrong no one," he said earnestly—she loosened her hand, for the carriage moved away.

She cried a good deal on her lonely run to London; but, then, her nerves were unstrung by anxiety, and to every woman the vision is dear of a home, whose clustering children call her "mother"—a home in which, with a busy welcome, she waits for the daily return of the one man she loves and admires. That was over.

She took a cab at the terminus—a growler (no hansoms for little Mary)—and innocently begged the man to drive fast. She looked up eagerly at the house on approaching it. "How is she?"—the words leaped from her lips.

"Who? She?" replied the servant, a new one.

"Miss Polly! My niece!"

A shriek rang down the staircase, as Polly tore down into the arms of her favourite aunt.

"Dear, dear Aunt May," cried Polly.

"Dear, dear Aunt May!"

"But, Polly, you've been ill," gasped the frightened aunt.

Polly stood away.

"Yes," she said, "ill and naughty. It was plums."

"Oh! that was three weeks ago, I remember. But yesterday——"

Polly shook her head.

"No, miss, begging your pardon," interrupted the servant, eager to make amends, "there's been nothing wrong with Miss Polly, miss." Then Polly's mother came out of the drawing-room, and gradually little Mary began to understand that she had been hocussed; that the telegram was a bogus telegram, sent to get her away before the bazar.

"Well, as I am here," she said calmly, "I shall stay till to-morrow night. The sale opens at two in the afternoon. No, don't, Selina! I should never have thought it of Louisa; still, you see, she wanted so desperately to sell at the stall. Let us talk of something else."

But that evening she went up to her room

and thought it all out. The removal of Mrs. Devereux Smith had doubtless rendered Louisa desperate. Still, this action was a crime. No, she could never have believed such wickedness possible in her sister. After much cogitation and prayer, she sat down, very pale, and wrote to the curate, begging him to forget that morning's conversation, never again to think of Louisa as a possible wife, nor, need it be said, of herself. In the simplest and kindest way she stated the facts which had just come to her knowledge. "I owe it to him," she said resolutely, with anguish at her heart. "I can not undertake the responsibility of what I said this morning in ignorance. No, the woman who could do such a thing is not a fit wife for Eric Brass." She got the letter posted that night, and then she pretended to sleep.

On the following afternoon she returned, getting back after dark. All the time she thought of Louisa with Eric at the sale, and hoped that her letter would have reached him in time. Never will she forget that terrible journey.

As she arrived at the house, the servant, Jane, ran hurriedly to meet her. "Oh, come up, miss, immediately!" cried Jane. "Oh, thank God, you've come home, miss!" Little Mary understood at once what had happened,

just as she had always expected it would; for life is like that.

"Missis is lying so still; she won't speak to me; I almost wish she would cough, miss," said the servant behind her on the staircase. Little Mary bent over her mother. "She's been coughing a great deal all day," whispered the servant. "Miss Louisa's away at the sale and was not to be sent for, she said, without reason. I was just about making up my mind——"

"Run for the doctor," said Mary.

But she did all that could be done long before the doctor came, and when he said, "Failure of the heart's action," she only said "Yes." She had always known it would be like this. Some day her mother's panting heart would suddenly stand still. It would be in one of those moments when Mary was not in the house.

She still sat sorrowful by the dark bedside, benumbed with loss, when, late at night, Louisa, in Mary's festive garments, burst into the room.

"Ma!" she cried; "only fancy, I'm engaged. You can't think to whom!"

Mary got up. "Mother is dead," she said. Louisa broke into noisy crying.

"Louisa," said Mary presently, "I forgive you; I don't know whom you got to send

that lying telegram from London; I shouldn't care to find out if I could. Good-night. I am very tired. There is nothing to be done at this hour. We shall meet in the morning."

"I—I'm engaged to Eric Brass," sobbed Louisa.

But next morning, in the midst of all the inevitable commotion caused by the bereavement, came two angry epistles from the curate (who had not yet heard), one for each of the sisters. He had found Mary's letter on getting back from a long day's work at the sale. And he wrote at once, in all his mortification, expressing the hope that here their acquaintance might end.

"The loathsome creature," said Louisa between her tears. "I suppose he got drunk last night, like all total abstainers!" But suddenly she started to her feet. "You told him about the telegram!" she cried.

"Yes," said little Mary.

"I hate you! I detest you! Wicked, spiteful thing! I shall never, never, though we live together for fifty years, never speak to you again!" Louisa rushed past her sister and out of the room.

A little later Jane, the housemaid, solicited an interview of Miss Mary.

"Please, Miss Mary," she said, "I should

take it as a favour if you would tell me as soon as anything is decided for the future, miss."

"There is not much to decide," said little Mary. "My sister and I will go on living here, I presume."

"Then please, Miss Mary, I should like to look for another situation," said Jane.

But she came up that night to little Mary's bedroom, with red eyes, and begged her pardon. She would like to stay with Miss Mary, she said.

"Yes, I think you ought to stay with me, Jane," said little Mary thoughtfully. "Yes, Jane, I do think you ought to stay with me."

JOHN.

JOHN was a Dutchwoman.

Well, no, she was hardly a woman—a mere slip of a girl. When I first saw her she was a hobbledehoy.

“Yes, my daughter is a very great trouble to me,” said her mother, *Mevrouw Barends*; “a source of continual vexation. She is rougher and noisier, I think, than the four boys put together. Well, perhaps that is only my fancy. You see, you hear a girl’s whistling, and you hardly hear a boy’s. But all my governesses leave me; you see, she makes apple-pie beds for them and booby traps and puts cobbler’s wax on their chairs, and goodness only knows what more she does! She is certainly most wild and reckless. ‘Madam,’ said my last but one English governess to me—poor little worn-out creature—‘I can do nothing, madam, with your daughter. She is Satan’s daughter, Sin!’”

“Surely that was rather rude to you,” I ventured.

"But a little judicious training——" began my aunt.

"Training? How, pray, would you train a girl of sixteen? My husband trains the four boys with a cane till they tremble in their shoes. But he makes the queerest distinctions; even when she was a tiny baby he would allow nobody to slap the girl."

"Certainly not," said my aunt, with some heat.

"Well, what will you have? The boys never get into any mischief at all; John, the tomboy, never seems out of it." I suppose my aunt understood it was hopeless to discuss her favourite hobby, pedagogy, with Mrs. Barends.

"The boys, then, I suppose," she said, "are good at their books?"

Stout Mevrouw Barends heaved a comfortable sigh. "Well, no," she said, "I can not say they are. None of them learn well; their masters are full of complaints. But what will you have? They know they are the children of Jan Barends. Their bread is buttered, they think, in this world."

"Riches make unto themselves wings!" said my aunt sententiously. "In our day, they flash away along the telegraph!"

Mevrouw Barends smiled complacently, folding her fat hands across her stiff silk dress.

"Very true," she said. "Oh, very true! Only last week there was Porder & Sons failed for a million!"

And the two ladies went off into eager discussion of the details which had got known about Mevrouw Porder's destitution. Meanwhile I reflected on the peculiarities, as far as I knew them, of this strange girl, John Barends.

Her real name was, of course, not John. I believe, but I am not sure, that it was Annie. In the nursery, her brothers, weary of her demands to be a boy, had, with much ceremony and unconscious profanity, solemnly rechristened her "John." It was their father's name; none of them bore it; they thus remedied what the family had always considered an oversight.

Three of John's brothers were her juniors; one was two years older. They were, all of them, fair, mealy skinned, lanky, unremarkable lads.

They overdressed for their age, with smart neckties, and gave themselves airs, as far as they dared, at their various day schools. Their father was an India merchant, reported, and proved, by his splendid style of living, to be exceedingly wealthy. His big head and fine presence were important features in the public life of the city; he had long been a member

of the town council and of various committees, charitable, artistic, educational; everybody stepped out of his way, or waylaid him. He was a stern man and a just, ready to do a good action sooner than a kind one. His sons were mortally afraid of him, his daughter loved him with the strong love that casteth out fear.

A strange, big, handsome girl, this John, with her father's firm features and curly black hair, very unlike her flabby mother, whom she pitied, often petted, and habitually almost despised. "Accomplishments!" said John. "I hate accomplishments. Mamma says a lady's education should be nothing but accomplishments. Then leave out the accomplishments, say I. Mamma's learned music; she can't play. She's learned drawing; she can't draw, she doesn't pretend to. Why, the other day, at Aunt Mary's, somebody asked her to play a polka for the children. 'Oh, I couldn't; I really couldn't,' she said. She was quite in a flurry. And once, when she drew a dog to amuse Tommy he thought it was a cow!"

There was a long pause; John sat thinking. "I suppose she could dance," spoke the shapely mouth at last, "if she weren't so stout. But then, I know how to dance without learning. Any one could learn how to

dance just by seeing it done. And the dancing master says I do it capitally, if only I could remember not to thump!"

John sighed, and dangled her long legs from the appletree branch she was perched upon.

"Accomplishments is idiotic, isn't it?" she said.

"Undoubtedly," I replied, for I had got her eldest brother Gerard to present me, and, in fact, I was stretched along the grass under the "Princesse Noble." That was the name of the apple.

"I mean unless of course they—that is to say, one of them—happens to be your vocation. Then, that one!"

"I understand, you think you are called to be a dancing mistress?"

"Of course not. I haven't the slightest idea of what might have been my vocation. But 'mamma says that I can't have one."

"Why not?"

"She says a vocation is unladylike. To be Miss Barends, she says, is my vocation! What I like is arithmetic; stiff sums with a lot of complications in them—compound interest. And bookkeeping! I love bookkeeping—especially finding out errors!"

"What do you know, dear young lady, of

bookkeeping? Do you mean keeping books that were lent to you?"

"I am not a young lady, and if I were, I shouldn't be a dear—at all events, not yours. And you needn't make feeble jokes. I did all my brother Gerard's tasks for him at the School of Commerce; he would never have got on if I hadn't."

"And did Gerard do your needlework?"

"No, don't laugh at my brother; I won't stand it. Gerard offered to touch up my drawing for me—he draws very prettily—but I wouldn't have it. I thought it would be mean."

"But it wasn't mean for you to do his work? I don't quite follow your argument."

"I'm not arguing; I hate arguments. The two things are quite different. A woman has to help men. They'd never get along if she didn't."

"True," I answered meekly. "They help us into the world, and they hurry us out."

"Huh!"

"Good-bye, Miss John."

What happened that evening I heard from Alfred, the third brother, aged ten. At least, with youthful ingenuousness, he told me as much as he considered judicious.

It appears that Mademoiselle Doucillon, John's latest French governess, had frequent-

ly expressed with perfunctory eagerness her horror of 'the men.' Her feelings were therefore naturally fluttered when, entering her room in the twilight, she found a great drunken fellow sprawling, snoring, across the bed. Without stopping to inquire how a dummy could snore, she filled the house with her screams. Everybody came running out into the corridor, and the children enjoyed the sight of their father in exceedingly undignified undress.

After dinner John was called into the drawing-room. She knocked up against a little table as she entered. Her father and mother exchanged glances. They sat on both sides of the mantelpiece and looked exactly as a naughty girl's father and mother ought to look.

"John," began Mynheer Barends sternly, "this sort of thing can not continue."

"What sort of thing, papa?" asked John sweetly. Then, afraid that the question partook somewhat of subterfuge, "Oh, you mean about the dummy. I have begged mademoiselle's pardon. Whoever thought a big woman would be afraid of a doll?"

"Whoever thought a big girl—of sixteen—would play such idiotic pranks?"

"Such disgraceful, unladylike pranks," put in Mevrouw Barends.

"Yes," said John submissively.

"In fact, your behaviour has simply become unendurable," continued the lady with some anger, "and, as the only solution, we shall send you to school!"

"To school?" echoed John. "Oh! papa, do you think that would be good for me?"

"It would be good for the boys," said Mevrouw Barends grimly.

"It would be good for the boys," echoed Mynheer. "You make the grossest abuse of your immunity as a girl. If one of the boys were to permit himself a tenth of the mischief you perpetrate I should flog him within an inch of his life."

"True; I had forgotten the boys," admitted John, more meekly still.

"Poor little Alfred and Tommy must be spared your evil example," said the mother.

"They are dear boys," replied John. "Papa, don't decide just yet about my going to school. Somehow, I don't think it would be good for me. Let me speak to the boys and tell them not to follow my evil example."

"Anne, you are impertinent!" exclaimed her mother.

John stared in open-mouthed amazement. Then she said: "But, mamma, after all they *don't* follow my example. You say so yourself!"

"Leave the room!" replied her mother. Mynheer Barends pompously sighed acquiescence. John crept away, and found the three elder boys waiting outside.

"Come to the schoolroom, all of you," she said.

They gathered in solemn conclave. John mounted on the back of a chair.

"Boys," she said, "I am going to boarding school." A shout of protest arose.

"Hush, you will wake Tommy! He is so small, he doesn't count. Yes, I am to be sent to a boarding school—for playing tricks." A deathly silence followed.

"Not, mind you, for being unladylike," continued John, nodding her black head, "nor for being untidy and tearing my clothes and upsetting things and making blots. To all these I plead guilty. But for playing tricks. Well, I like tricks. They're great fun sometimes. Ah, me!"—she heaved a deep sigh, and looked up wistfully to the schoolroom ceiling—"how I used to enjoy them once!"

None of the three boys spoke; they were busily inspecting their boots.

"At boarding school," mused John, "I shall have to be proper all day. You can't jump down the stairs, two steps at a time, at boarding school. At boarding school they teach all the girls to behave like Cousin Sue."

A smile crossed three grave faces at the thought of John's behaving like that very affected little lady, Cousin Sylvia, whom "those aggravating children" had nicknamed Sue.

"I propose," began Gerard solemnly, "that we all go to father and promise to be sureties for John's good behaviour." He looked meaningly at his two young brothers. "We will promise that she won't play any more tricks."

"I feel nervous," said Alfred.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed John. "I'll go with you!"

"No; you stop here," commanded Gerard, who was eighteen, and wore an incipient mustache. The three boys marched off to the drawing-room and interviewed their parents. They were very affectionate and affecting. Alfred remembers that when he accepted the responsibility for John's reformation he placed his right hand on his heart.

"Very well," said their father, touched, and bearing down Mevrouw Barends' objections; "but the first time anything of the kind occurs again, she goes!"

The boys trooped out. John, disdaining eavesdropping, had posted herself at the farther end of the hall.

"And now, you youngsters, listen to me," said Gerard; "the first time a practical joke

occurs in this house again I'll buy a cane and lick you worse than my father would."

There was a moment of awed silence, then Alfred burst out: "You used to——"

"Never mind what I used to. There was no talk of boarding schools for John in those days."

John demonstratively kissed her three brothers in spite of their opposition, rump-ling their hair, as was her wont. "If I could hate you for anything," said Gerard, "it would be, John, for rumpling my hair."

"I haven't damaged the back parting," replied John; "it's lovely, the back parting. Like a path that ends in a bush."

"Go and wash your hands; there's ink on them," angrily retorted Gerard.

"And bear's grease," answered John, running off. "Never mind, Freddy; don't look glum. You can always start business under your *own* name, if you choose"—she popped her head back through the schoolroom door—"and ask papa to make up the accounts!"

Then for several weeks all went well. At least the mischief John got into was all of her own concocting. She tried, untaught, her brother's bicycle, and damaging the machine considerably, damaged herself still more. Her sprained wrist rendering her especially awkward, she poured a whole torrent of beer over

her mother's dress, and broke a glass on her toilet table. And being taken by Gerard, for comfort, a sail in his sailing boat she fell into the water. Mademoiselle Doucillon, who was the only "authority" apprised of this mishap, foolishly promised to keep the secret—after much eager pleading on the part of all the boys—and then still more foolishly betrayed it. Two days later a most interesting portrait in mademoiselle's bedroom, a young Frenchman in military uniform, mysteriously disappeared. John indignantly protested against the charge of having committed an action her womanly instincts characterized as "mean beyond words." Nevertheless, her parents decided to take a step for which reasons abounded, and the young lady departed to a superior establishment, whose horrified proprietress hardly recognised her as such. On the evening of her departure Gerard, who surely was all weakness and good nature, actually carried out his threat. To this circumstance Alfred never alluded. But he has confided to me his conviction that, in the days when the two elders were as little as he was, few tricks (of the many) had been perpetrated for which any one was thrashed. "Catch Gerard taking his share!" the young gentleman added spitefully. I felt he was right, but I thought it judicious to say, "You are biassed." He in-

quired what was the meaning of this word, and, on the spur of the moment, I gave him an apposite answer, which, however, I dare not set down.

John wrote cheerful letters from school, and her mistress sent reports which at first described her as lamentably deficient in all the acquirements a young girl of her position ought to have possessed. Then, gradually, the school took unto itself the credit of incipient "improvement." When she came back for the holidays, the anxious boys, in response to her anxious questions, said they did not see it. She breathed a great sigh of relief and tumbled down her back hair, which had been made to grow into a "bob." But her father, who she thought was looking red and congested, and her mother, who was grown fatter than ever, nodded approval to each other. "She is growing up handsome," said *Mevrouw Barends*.

"She was always handsome," replied the merchant. "I hope she will marry well." The friend who was dining with them laughed at this idea. He was *Barends'* great rival in the India trade of the city—his one rival, his one friend.

"I beg your pardon," said *Nicholas Brook*, "but it seems so absurd a conception! One can hardly realize, as yet, a *Mrs. John!*"

"She is nearly eighteen," replied the merchant, nettled. "That, of course, seems an infantine age to a bachelor past forty."

"Hovering—hovering on the edge!" cried Nicholas Brook.

"To cavil at your age is to confess yourself old," replied Barends. "Do you know, it is very extraordinary, Brook, the one thing that girl appears to be clever at is sums! She doesn't care tuppence for literature, poetry, and so on, her schoolmistress says. But she's good at all practical work, and at arithmetic."

"Not at sewing," put in Mrs. Barends.

"Of course, I know. I know all about your children as much as yourself," replied Brook. "Haven't I seen them grow up? You will have to put John in business," he laughed.

"Gerard won't be much good there," replied the merchant, and sighed.

Mrs. Barends rose from table. "You have had wine enough, Jan," she said. "Don't take any more."

"Why, nonsense! I've only drunk three glasses of claret."

"The doctor doesn't allow you more than two."

"Oh, the doctor—what rubbish! Doctors always grudge you any drink that tastes good!"

But a few months later John was suddenly called away from school by the tidings of her father's death in a fit.

She rushed back—some people's thoughts rush on such occasions, some people's lag—she rushed back and fell, heart foremost, into a scene of more than ordinary confusion. Death has a horrible habit of pulling away, in our card structures, the very card on which the whole edifice hangs. He is an artist in his way; there exists no more picturesque arranger of ruins.

Mevrouw Barends, utterly bewildered and shaken, sat in the darkened drawing-room weeping noisy tears. A sense of her widow's importance was upon her; and in this, as in a woollen garment, she wrapped her shivering desolation. She was one of those women whose social assumption and household aplomb are borne up on a flow of continuous prosperity, one of those magnificent dahlias whose husband is the pot. "Oh, Annie," she said weeping; "oh, dear Annie, the burgomaster's wife has already called!"

On the dining-room sofa lay Gerard, white and interesting. In the schoolroom the two boys were quarrelling over postage stamps. When John entered they both simultaneously gave way, and Alfred went to build up bricks for little Tommy.

"Who is doing things?" John asked Gerard, when she had cried her cry and got calm. She sat on the table in the dining-room opposite Gerard's sofa.

"What things? Oh! nobody. We're expecting Uncle George."

"Uncle George is no good," replied John emphatically.

"Well, he's all we've got. Never was a family had so few connections. Mamma with no brothers at all, and papa with only Uncle George."

"Uncle George can't lace his own boots!" exclaimed John impatiently. "You know papa always used to say so. Uncle George can just live in his sleepy village and read his Latin books. He'll sit with mamma and sigh. Somebody must *act*, now papa's dead!"

"Oh, John! how can you be so coarse?" said Gerard, and the tears came into his pale-blue eyes.

She left him in disgust, and went to find the family butler. Fortunately, that domestic had been with them many years, and had become, so far as Mevrouw Barend's fretful masterfulness would allow, a bit of a factotum. "Do you know what has to be done?" she asked with a gulp. "Then tell me." And together they got everything ready for the widow's approval. That lady suggested a

number of impractical alterations, said John was unfeeling, and finally acquiesced in all the arrangements she afterward declared to have been unsuitable in themselves or erroneously carried out. Uncle George came and sat by his sister-in-law in the dreary drawing-room. He sighed so seldom that John could not help feeling a little aggrieved.

And the first few solemn days passed by, amid a downpour of perfunctory sympathy, a good deal of public notice, and much semi-official mourning. When the grand funeral was over, the Barendses began to realize that it is easy for an active man to know everybody, to be generally esteemed and universally regretted—and that that is all.

It was no surprise to John to find Gerard shedding tears one morning, all by himself, in his father's room.

He started up. "What do you mean by——?" he began. "What——" He sank back into his chair. "Look at these!" he said, with a sweep of his hand across a whole floor of papers spread out before him. "I can't make head or tail of these!"

"What are they?"

"A lot of business letters and things sent up from the office."

"Of course," she said, "the office. I quite understand."

"Do you? I wish you did."

"Why don't you ask somebody to help you, Gerard?"

"There's only one man could help me, and he's our chief rival. Papa told me never to speak to him about the business."

"You mean Nicholas Brook? I wonder papa should say that. I like Mr. Brook. In these days he has been as kind as an outsider could be."

"Oh, you talk, because you know nothing of business! Only a girl or a fool would ask advice of a rival."

Without answering, she drew some of the papers toward her and began studying them. He would have pulled them away. "Oh, nonsense!" he said. "You can't understand. We shall have to sell the business or something!"

"Sell the business!" she cried, facing round.

"Yes, of course. I've been telling mother. It'll be an awful loss, but it can't be helped!"

"And what'll you do?"

"Nothing, I suppose. I must see. There'll be enough, I should think, for all of us to live on." She swept all the documents into her arms and went off to her bedroom.

Half an hour later she looked in upon her

brother. He was lying on the sofa with a book.

"I don't understand them all," she said. "I understand a good deal. I'm going down to the office to talk with Mynheer Perk." He started up with angry opposition, but already she had closed the door and was gone.

She went straight to the office, and asked for Mynheer Perk. She found the book-keeper in her father's private room, and quite unconsciously seated herself in her father's place to discuss the morning's post and the general state of affairs.

"Mynheer Perk," she said, "it surely would be absurd to stop the business?"

For a moment there arose before the dependent's eyes a brilliant vista of a unique opportunity. He waited one second, and then said, resolutely: "Most certainly, it would be disastrous." Then he added: "And yet Mynheer Gerard——"

"Mynheer Gerard——?"

"You see, Juffrouw, there is only Mynheer Gerard."

She got up, went to the dull window, looked out on the dull court.

"You and we must keep on the business together," she said. "I could do the book-keeping, at least some of it; I can learn more. And Gerard must get into it also. He will,

if we don't press him. Just now he is too nervous. I will talk it over with Mynheer Gerard, Mynheer Perk."

She held out her hand, and the funny little middle-aged foggy bent over it with a bow which he felt was a success.

Much talking, however, had to ensue between the parties concerned, and many objections had to be fought down before the widow, her children, and the old bookkeeper could agree as to how things should work. It was figures did it in the end, as on most similar occasions—hard plus and minus, for and against. John, with Perk's aid, figured out in black and white what the sale of the business would mean to the family. They were not so rich as they had always believed themselves to be. The three younger children were still at school. Brought face to face with the facts, Mevrouw Barends consented, and John very quietly, undramatically, settled down as best she could to the unwelcome routine of the office. For, when the first excitement was over and the veiled curiosity of the clerks had subsided, the life, to a restless creature like John, was most wearily monotonous. Gerard came, out of regard for his sister, but was really no good. John emphatically was. "She has the regular business instinct," said little Mynheer Perks. "I could not have

managed without her. Honestly, I confess, I have *not* the business instinct. I am too nervous. I have not sufficient initiative. *I* am an excellent bookkeeper. Now, she thinks that is her forte; she is mistaken. She is accurate enough, but, Mynheer Brook, she makes blots!" He threw up his hands in horror. Nicholas Brook had listened silently, with a smile. He had offered assistance some weeks ago to Gerard, but had been excitedly, and therefore almost rudely, repulsed. He still called from time to time, but more rarely, for Mevrouw Barends had been taught by Gerard to look upon "the rival" with suspicion. The lad, in his nervousness and incompetence, buried his head in the sand. John, meanwhile, plodded on. Once Brook had ventured to chaff her.

"Don't," she said; "I like you, but don't." And he had immediately desisted.

Mevrouw Barends sighed. "Annie has thrown away," she said, "what chances of marriage she may possibly have had! Nobody would marry a queer girl like that."

Meanwhile the business remained fairly prosperous; yet John's end and ambition seemed defeated, for Gerard, instead of growing into his responsibilities, slunk away from them more and more.

And a period of crisis came for the India

trade, especially for that branch represented by Barends & Sons. Jan Barends had been largely mixed up with a new system of sugar production in Java; a couple of factories with entirely novel machinery (the "Ruffschmidt" process, now so famous) had been started under his auspices and worked with his capital. They were barely in working order when the so-called sugar panic arose. To keep the thing going, to make it, almost certainly, a success, more money was wanted—ninety thousand florins—at once. It was almost impossible at that moment to get that sum. With one sugar plantation ruined after another, with prices daily melting down before German beet root, the Indian banks refused advances at any price. John could understand this, as well as Mynheer Perk, and, as one denial after another was telegraphed to the office, she sat pale before her books.

"Didn't I tell you so?" cried Gerard, nervously sniggering. "It was madness for me to go on with the business! And now we are ruined!"

"Not ruined yet," said John.

"Very nearly," said little Mynheer Perk.

"You have telegraphed to the Batavian and Borneo Banking Company," said John. "*They* haven't answered yet. Meanwhile, Gerard, please let me write my letters." She

turned away to the papers before her and began to scribble away. An hour later the telegram was brought to the office. They all three gathered together to read it. The Batavian company accepted, on mortgage and a high rate of interest, arduous terms.

"Well, that's all right then," said Gerard.

"For the moment," muttered Mynheer Perk.

"We must do all we can," said John.

"The terms are bad, but they might have been worse."

Mynheer Perk went off to the exchange for his daily visit; meanwhile the young people worked on. They were not prepared for the state of excitement in which the frigid little man returned. "Do you know," he said, as he closed the glass door, "who has done this thing? No. You would never guess!"

"Nicholas Brook," answered John.

"How? You knew!" cried the little man, disappointed, amazed.

"No, I guessed," replied John.

"Then our ruin," groaned Gerard, "is only a question of time. At the earliest opportunity he will sell up—foreclose!"

"So I suppose," acquiesced Mynheer Perk; "it is a very clever stroke of business. It renders him absolute master of the sugar market here."

John got down from her stool. "I don't believe it," she said; "I don't understand. I am going to ask him."

Gerard stretched out his arm. "Don't be a fool!" he said. "You're always meddling and bothering. Why can't you do your bit of work, and leave the worry to me and Perk?"

John stopped with her hat already on. "I believe he has done it out of sheer kindness, or something," she said. "You don't want to be beholden to him, do you?"

"N-n-no," replied Gerard.

"Sheer kindness, my dear young lady?" cried Perk; "just look at the terms!"

"Well, if he means mischief——"

"He *must* mean mischief," said Perk.

"I can give him a bit of my mind," concluded John, and she fled.

She drove boldly to Nicholas Brook's office, a thing she detested. What work she had done in the firm she had always rigorously done behind the scenes. "I typewrite for Gerard," that was her explanation of her presence in the sanctum.

Nicholas Brook received her immediately in his private room.

"What can I do for you, John?" he said cheerfully.

"Nothing," she answered stiffly. "That was what I came to say."

"It isn't much to come for. But perhaps you are hardly so busy at your place as we are here?"

"Don't sneer; that's one thing I can't stand," replied John, her lip trembling. "Rightly or wrongly, we are informed that a considerable advance for which we applied to a bank in India has been accorded us, through them, by—you! I want to know if that's true?"

"And supposing I refuse to answer your question?"

"That will be sufficient answer. You refuse?"

"No."

"You needn't, for your face has answered. Now, I want to know why."

"You are too clever a reader of faces, John. Positively dangerous."

"Do not laugh at me. God knows I am not in a laughing mood. We are very nearly ruined. Do you want to ruin us entirely? I don't believe it."

"Does Gerard?"

"What I want to know is, why have you done this action which looks cruel? The terms are terribly hard."

"Ah! you don't believe I could be really cruel? Thanks."

"I don't know. I don't understand," said

poor John, almost crying. "I could see the enormous advantage of crushing our business. Perhaps, if I were in your position, I might do it myself."

"But you can't quite realize me in that rôle, all the same. Thanks, again."

"After all, I don't think it very much matters. Gerard will never be good at the business; certainly not unless he has far better help than mine. But it's awful to think we had better have stopped when father died." And John began to cry in earnest. She stopped almost at once. "Don't think I have come here to move you by playing the cry-baby," she said fiercely. "I don't want to move you. But you're papa's old friend, and I want to understand."

"You are perfectly correct in your assumptions," replied Brook. "I want to absorb the business." He spoke slowly, looking away from her. She waited, staring.

"It is absurd that these two should still run side by side—still more that they should fight each other. I intend, if you will allow me, to become a partner in your business, if you will become a partner in mine."

She bent forward, listening.

"I am growing old—I am one and forty. You are nearly twenty, I believe. Of course, I have some experience, and you have energy.

And you have a whole family to look after, so in one sense I am younger than you. John, darling, have I got you here at last?—you brave, dear, queer girl—Gerard and you made it impossible for me to help you decently. You must either take me into partnership, or go smash!”

“I’d rather go smash, under the circumstances!” replied John, drawing back.

“No you wouldn’t; you’re too good a man of business! It would be sheer waste of—of everything, and a good business man never wastes. But he ventures and—and look here! I’m going to venture!” He caught her in his arms and kissed her.

“And win!” he said.

“I—I should like to have been made love to properly,” said John.

He held her at arm’s length. “John!” he cried in protest, “’tis the last thing you’d have liked!”

“Mamma has always declared I should never marry,” replied John.

“For *once*, then, you must venture to contradict her!” said Nicholas Brook.

MADAME DE LIANCOURT.

"You, now—you do everything wrong!" said Monsieur de Liancourt.

Madame de Liancourt looked up from her needlework. "I have heard that so often," she answered, "it begins to lose its charm."

Monsieur de Liancourt threw himself back in his big armchair by the bedroom fire, a semi-goodnatured smile playing across his handsome face. "It is a truth," he said, "we have always with us! Hourly, under some new aspect, it presents itself. At first, I am astonished; then I know it again. Ah, I say, welcome, it is you—*la gaucherie de ma femme!*" He lay watching his wife through the blue smoke of his cigarette—a pleasant-looking man in his undress evening jacket, florid, barely forty, still young and anxious to look younger, a little bald at the top (oh, the pity of it!), well preserved, and laboriously groomed. "Ah, it is you," he repeated. "*La gaucherie de ma femme!*"

Madame de Liancourt did not look up

again. "You spoil your effect entirely," she said, "by repetition." She was seven years her husband's junior. Perhaps she was not exactly a beautiful woman. Perhaps her supremely graceful figure was a thought too tall; perhaps a slight ripple was wanting in the smooth radiance of her golden hair. That is possible. She possessed in absolute perfection the unfathomable quality we call "distinction," which birth and breeding solely and rarely confer.

"Now, those ribbons! You are sewing them all on wrong!" he said.

She threw down her work at once, quite hopeless. "I have always said I never could sew!" she cried.

"Let me arrange it for you," he answered, and with nimble fingers he began festooning the cherry-red bows on the white blouse she was trying to alter. "You are a rich man's daughter," he said, "and I was a poor man's son. All the difference lies there. 'Necessity is the mother of invention'—ah, how true! And I—I have always been necessitous."

"We were brought up very simply," pleaded Madame de Liancourt.

"Of course, my dear. The highest luxury is always simple. My father could never have afforded to be so stin——so frugal as yours."

"Papa has endless expenses. He is not

rich, as wealth goes nowadays. None of the old families are rich that have only their land to rely on."

"*Ma chère*, it is as if I heard your father speaking. True, he is not rich compared with these people, for instance, in whose house we are staying. Still, there has always been plenty at Faussinières—rough plenty, I admit—for you and your half-dozen brothers and sisters."

"Ah, Faussinières!" Madame de Liancourt laid down her work in her lap, crumpling it under the dull weight of her hands.

"Your ideal, I know!" replied her husband, and stared at the gold-beaded slippers upon his shapely feet. "A wild life in the backwood—a kingdom of Robinson Crusoe among numerous Fridays!" He made a grimace. "And when there comes a sail! a sail! from Paris—to Paris—pretending not to see it! Leave us in the desert, among the black Fridays—we are kings—we are savages—adieu!"

She laughed. "So be it," she said. "It is not a good preparation for the fashionable world."

His bright face grew grave. "No, indeed," he said. She looked at him almost appealingly. "I," he went on, "I was never a king, or a Crown Prince, like your brothers—

are they all Crown Princes?—an official's son, myself an official of petty nobility; it is not much, but undoubtedly it civilizes; the dwelling in Paris, the growing up on the boulevards, the mixing with others! Even the odious bureau—much as I detest it—one meets people there; one hears things; one knows how to behave.”

“Ah, that is it—that I shall never know,” said Madame de Liancourt.

“Foolishness! You are only a little ‘savage,’ and after seven years in Paris—true—that is absurd!”

“To-night also, then,” she said meekly, “I have not succeeded in pleasing my lord and master?”

He got up and began pacing the room. “How stupidly you put it!” he exclaimed. “Who talks of pleasing me? It is you one thinks of—your success in the world, your position—it is what they say that one cares about, Madame de Liancourt!”

“Raoul, when you go to these fashionable parties, these shootings, you should send me to Faussinières.”

“Almost I would vex myself! Will you never then realize that you are no longer Lise—what a name—de Barency?”

The tears sprang to her eyes. “You do not even now, then, like my name!” she said.

His back was turned to her. "Admit," he replied, "that it is frequent among the female Fridays of Faussinières!"

"It is a pity," she said bitterly, "that my mother did not, like the banker's woman here, call her daughter Frédégonde! I fear she knew hardly enough of the ancient history of France."

He burst into a loud laugh. "No, no," he cried, "those sort of names are in execrable taste. Even mine has got too common! But Frédégonde de Schlopsmeyer—that is too funny! And yet"—he paused—"I like these people, I value them; they are of real importance. Everything in the house is perfect; the shooting is excellent; there are a dozen of us down for it, and all thoroughly enjoying ourselves."

She sighed. "We will not discuss the matter," she said. "We are here. I am very glad that you enjoy it."

He paused in his walk. "I feel you're not enjoying it," he said.

"Why? That does not influence your arrangements."

"Still, of course, I observe your dislike."

"It annoys you—I can not help that."

"Lise, you are very unkind."

"Oh, no! not that—not that."

"Worse—you are out of temper. I be-

lieve that you actually object to my innocent flirtations with Madame de Girondelle and—and——”

“For the moment there is no ‘and.’”

“Fie! it is not so bad as that. There is always an ‘and.’”

She laughed again, despite herself.

“If you only knew,” he continued, “how ridiculous we both make ourselves. Had I not flirtations, in this society, you would make us both altogether impossible.”

Once more she dallied with her work.

“Oh, leave that thing!” he said impatiently. “Let some maid do it. That’s no good, anyhow.”

“What do you mean—that I make you ridiculous? Surely, whatever may be my shortcomings, I have never fallen short of the respect which is due to your name.”

“*Ma chère*, you talk like a last-century novel. No, you have not fallen short of the respect which is due to my name. Nobody wants you to disgrace it. But it is your ultra-respectability which renders us ridiculous—*voilà!*”

“You speak in enigmas,” she answered.

“Ah! when a woman says *that* to her husband, she has already begun to understand. Quite so. Woman is the eternal enigma; she can not be treated or treated of otherwise.

The fact remains that nowadays the woman who does not dance on the brink of the precipice is as little thought of as the woman who has fallen over it."

"Pray dance!" she said.

"You are illogical. As it happens, there is no precipice for men—another enigma! But certainly for me it is not pleasant to hear men say: '*Tiens*, who is that?' and find they have passed on without waiting for a reply."

"I can not help it if I am not beautiful."

"Every woman can help it, to begin with, if she have not some charm. As for beauty, you are not less beautiful than most of the women staying in this house."

"Say 'all,'" she begged.

"You are exacting!"

"Yes, indeed; there is Madame de Girondelle, whose name sounds like a cough lozenge! *Si vous toussiez*——"

"The Girondelles are one of the oldest families of the Gironde," he replied with some heat. "In all these matters you are lamentably ignorant. Every word that you utter about society shows that you have been brought up entirely outside it."

"Where I should like to remain."

"You can not. We are too poor—*voilà*! With people like you and me society connec-

tions are so much capital. Heavens! you might be a power!"

"By my beauty, or by my knowledge of pedigrees?"

"No; a thousand times, no! By what makes a woman a power—*savoir faire, savoir plaire!* By making yourself noticed, by having men who are somebodies pay you attentions, flatter you, speak of you. What use is to a man his admiration of a wife whom nobody else admires? In the end, he also ceases to find cause for admiration. *Tiens*, I would not have said that, but you provoke me! You sit there among all these brilliant, foolish, delightful women like——"

"A Cinderella!"

"Who will never find a prince!"

"I fancied I had found him, but"—her eyes kindled—"I fear he was a boor."

"Lise!"

She had risen. Shall we go to bed, *mon prince?*" she said. "It is one o'clock. Cinderella, especially before the godmother came, kept earlier hours than that."

"You are always sleepy before any one else is. It is a relic of Faussinières, where everybody sleeps all day in the eternal dulness of the woods."

"Like the sleeping beauty," she answered, looking away and speaking in a toneless voice.

"Mind lest the wrong prince wakes me!"
And after that they spoke no more.

Next morning Madame de Liancourt, a little later than her husband—she was always late—appeared at the noisy eleven o'clock breakfast table. And the first thing she heard was Frédégonde's Schlopsmeyer's shrieky voice:

"It is my idea! It is excellent! It shall be!"

"*La reine le veut*," said, with a lazy bow, the Vicomte de Belvalette.

"Be silent; I have not appointed you my herald," replied the dark heiress coquettishly. "The conditions are these. Every gentleman will select his own buttonhole before dinner this evening, without telling what it is, and the lady who happens to wear the same flower as any particular gentleman will dance with him two out of every three dances to-night!"

"Oh, but no! Oh, but no!" cried several voices in protest.

"Monsieur de Belvalette, I appoint you my herald!"

"*La reine le veut!*" exclaimed, with weary pretence of pomposity, the Vicomte de Belvalette.

"If I understand aright," said Raoul de Liancourt, bending forward from his place, "we may all select our flowers for ourselves

—there are to be no buttonholes distributed to-night—we may pick the flowers, if need be, ourselves? ”

“ Yes, but none of us may see you; it is secret; you may not tell.”

“ In other words, we are not to choose our own partners? ”

“ For once in a way—for two dances or three—you are to trust to good fortune! ”

“ Good fortune, I! ” Monsieur de Liancourt gave a groan.

“ How flattering to your partner that is to be! ”

Everybody laughed; they were the usual country-house crowd of the shooting season; why should they not laugh? They had nothing else to do.

“ We may trust, in a certain degree, to perspicacity,” said one bald young *viveur*.

“ Or to hints,” said, languidly, Madame de Girondelle.

The heiress struck her hand on the table. “ No hints! ” she said angrily. “ That would be ungentlemanly, unfair. That would spoil it all. I will have no hints.”

“ Really? ” Madame de Girondelle slowly raised a toy eyeglass to her turquoise-blue eyes. “ You excite yourself, Freddy,” she said, and dropped her glass.

“ Oh, I understand it of course,” said

Raoul to his wife in their own room, where he was leisurely preparing himself for a couple of hours among the pheasants—they took their shooting lazily these Schlopsmeyers; at least in the intervals between the big *battues*. “I understand it all. So probably do you?”

“I have not that pleasure,” replied Madame de Liancourt, listlessly looking out of the window; “understand what?”

“The little Schlopsmeyer,” he went on impatiently; “she will wear Belvalette’s favourite flower; oh! she will find out—trust a woman to find out; it is his last day here—he leaves to-morrow; she will dance with him all night, and at last he will declare himself, now or never; it is as plain, the whole thing, as—as—the old Mamma Schlopsmeyer; nothing could be plainer.”

“Guy de Belvalette!” cried Madame de Liancourt, and faced round from the window, all her listlessness gone.

“Of course. Dear me! have you observed nothing? Must I inform you that the Schlopsmeyers have set their hearts on this marriage?”

“It would break his mother’s heart!”

“Surely that has done breaking! When a pious woman marries among the Belvalette men, her heart can go on cracking like ice in a thaw!”

"Guy adores his mother, and she him—I know it well."

"True, you are some sort of relation?"

"No, but Madame de Belvalette was my mother's dearest friend. I have stayed with them often. I used, long ago, to call Guy by his name."

"That is an honour—the 'having called'—which you share with many women. His life is a series of stages, travelled post haste, with a change of companion in the chaise at each stoppage."

"I think you do him wrong."

"Wrong? Far from it. He is every man's envy! And every woman's ambition! The men bribe his tailors—the women?—for a woman it is the *bâton de maréchal* to have made the conquest of Guy de Belvalette."

"I do not see the glory."

"You? My dear, you have not even enlisted. You are not of the army of conquest—you! At the most, you are enrolled in the *garde civile*. You protect the hearth and the home."

She turned red, still gazing out of the window, to which she had long ago returned. "I will not believe," she said, "that the Vicomte de Belvalette——"

"Who is worse than poor——"

"Will marry the daughter of Schlopsmeyer——"

"Who is more than rich. These, my dear, are your backwood ideas. He will marry her——"

"It would be an infamy!" she interrupted, trembling with excitement.

"And she will be happy"—he paused in the doorway with his gun—"and Guy will continue to make the social successes of the woman he smiles upon! He will never make yours!" The door closed sharply. Madame de Liancourt stood by the window.

Presently, the colour still coming and going upon her cheeks, she drew herself up, with the rapid movement of one who takes a painful but unchangeable resolve, and she passed down into the noisy great hall with that graceful sweep of her lissom figure which many lovelier women might envy, and did.

She threaded her way straight to the Viscomte. "Monsieur de Belvalette," she began. "Ah, you are going shooting!"—she stopped.

The viscount turned his listless head.

"Every one is, madame, I believe," he said. "If there were anything else, I should be only too glad——"

"No, no; I would not keep you from your sport. But only, I had thought if you were

weary—you had promised to show me that drive, and to-morrow——”

“To the Moulin du Gué? By all means! It would be delightful. Let us slip away at once! Ah, ciel——”

“Where are you off to, Guy? Do not keep me waiting!” Madame de Girondelle interposed her little turn-up nose, “Freddy will be angry. She was saying——”

“Let her say, *ma cousine!*” The vicomte was away to the stables in search of a trap; not an easy thing to find, even in that luxurious establishment, at the moment when every one was starting for the day. Ultimately he turned out with a second-rate dog cart into the now deserted courtyard. Madame de Liancourt stood awaiting him.

“You look charming,” he said, perhaps mechanically.

“Don’t!” Her blood boiled with the thought of her husband’s scorn.

“I could not get a groom. Do you mind?”

“Mind! Why? Surely you know all about horses?”

“Less than most men. But it was not that I meant. However, I can certainly drive a more mettlesome steed than this. What an excellent idea of yours! This is almost like the old days at Belvalette.”

"When your mother would never have allowed anything of the kind."

"My mother is always right about young girls; about married women she is always——"

"Do not dare to say 'wrong!'" They were driving fast through the many-tinted autumn beechwoods. He waited for a moment, flicking his whip.

"Right also," he said very gravely. "It is good of you to come with me, madame."

"But you have promised——"

"And I never break my promises to——"

"Oh, Monsieur de Belvalette!"

"You."

"Because you never made any but this—which you had very nearly broken."

"Test me. If I make you a promise, I swear I will not break it."

"You talk like Herod. Well, then, give me in a charger the head of——"

"Whom?"

He turned to look at her.

"What nonsense! I hope, madame, your mother is well?"

"Undoubtedly. This morning I am sure she has said to her confessor: 'Ah, *mon père*, if my son would but range himself!'"

"And the father confessor has answered:

“Ah, Madame la Vicomtesse, if he but would!”

“And here, at a hundred miles distance, my cousin de Girondelle has echoed: ‘Ah, dear friends, if he but would.’ What beautiful unanimity! If women would but spend upon their own affairs a tenth of the energy they devote——”

“Monsieur de Belvalette, you are becoming rude.”

“Ah, madame, I was looking at the subject from your point of view. I was speaking as you would speak! By Heavens, I was!” he exclaimed with some warmth. “To me you have always been the exception. And Yvonne de Girondelle is the rule.”

“We are coming out into the open country. That bend is very beautiful.”

“In another moment you will have the view of the river. After all, I am unjust to Yvonne; she means well; she is probably right. Like most men I grumble, but I do what my women tell me to.”

“You could not have a better adviser than your mother.”

“And Yvonne. You see they are my two estates, secular and spiritual.”

“And the third estate?”

“If it came, would of course be the Schlopsmeyer! It sounds like a page out of

French history—the Abbe Siéyès. What is the third estate? Nothing. What would it be? Everything. Alas, everything!” he sighed.

“You do not mean half what you say.”

“What does it matter, as long as I mean the ‘worser’ half? Alas, everything!” he sighed again.

“Stop sighing at once!” She tapped the knob of her parasol.

“If I did, I should laugh. And that would be fatal. These things should be done solemnly, sadly, with full perception of the inevitable, the overwhelming.”

“Or not at all.”

Again he looked askance at her. “That is the rather monotonous advice,” he said, “of all who have done it.”

“Done what?”

“Married.”

“Surely you could make a suitable match!”

“What do you call ‘suitable?’ What is to ‘suit’ on both sides? Birth? or fortune? or temperament?”

“All three.”

“You are indeed a fortunate woman, madame.” There was irony in his tone; there was far more pathos. She bit her under lip. And they drove in silence along the brown

embankment, with the stealthy river gliding alongside.

"I have no reason to complain," she said, striving with all her might to keep her voice steady. "But you know I was not speaking of myself. Marriage is a very different thing for men or for women. With men it is fortune; with women it is fate. I—of course I am grieved that I am not to my husband what I should be. No—I am not at all the wife he ought to have had."

"No man," he said grimly, "gets the wife he deserves."

"No, but you understand what I mean. I am not speaking of good or bad. Raoul should have had a wife who was *brilliant*, who could shine in society, who could help him in his career."

"In a word, *une femme tapageuse!*"

"Not exactly; and yet, I am too quiet. I am only good for the backwoods, I."

"They are the abode of nymphs."

"Do not laugh at me. Ah, how lovely is that curve of the hillside! Is that building down yonder by the poplars the Moulin du Gué? Often I ask myself: Would it not gladden Raoul's heart if I had success among men?"

"Surely you wrong him."

"And I know that it would."

"*Parbleu*—after all, he is a man. Do you know, our conversation has been so engrossing I almost fear I have missed our turning—the place where we should have slipped off the bank!"

"Let us go on; I love losing my way."

"And I then?—*à deux*."

"But, alas! I have not got it in me."

"To lose your way? No, madame, emphatically you have not. Do not try. It were useless."

"Monsieur de Belvalette, you have always been a good friend to me. Formerly, especially when we were children. Of late we have rarely met. But I hear of your reputation. It is terrible."

"Madame, I am confident your husband praises me."

"He says that you make or unmake a social success. To me that is terrible."

"Forgive me, he talks foolishness."

"Ah! no; he is too worldly wise to do that. But, somehow, I like you. I trust you, whom no one should trust. It is because I am—how do you say—out of the running?"

"The expression is doubtless Monsieur de Liancourt's. But I thank you for your trust. I thank you for more. I thank you for having taught me, long ago, without knowing it yourself, that there are women who re-

mained—out of the running. I owe you more than I can ever repay.” (Did his voice tremble a little?) “If there was anything I ever could do for you?——” he paused.

She also waited.

“You could do nothing,” she answered slowly. “See, violets!” she suddenly exclaimed. “Along the roadside! Violets, at this time of the year. My favourite flowers!”

“The violets of Faussinières,” he answered. “Would you like me to get you some? Anyhow, it is useless our driving on here. We are driving away into absurdity.” As he spoke he stopped his horse. “We can not turn on this embankment,” he said. “There seems no chance of a turning.”

“Then what shall we do?”

“Pick some violets first—your favourite flowers!” They got down, and she stood before the mare while he gathered a great bunch of the tiny blossoms. As he handed her them, flushed with so much stooping, he detached a large buttonhole and stuck it in his covert coat.

“And now we must unharness this animal,” he said. “You will laugh at me, but really I am not at all sure of my powers as a stable boy. I have saddled dozens of horses, but I don’t remember ever having harnessed one.”

"Is that all?" she replied, laughing. "I am sure of my powers as a stable boy—I!" And for the moment, as she helped his bungling fingers, strapping and unstrapping on the lofty river bank, she felt, with a delightful sense of enjoyment, her superiority over this wonderful man, whom so many women had found irresistible, who, to her, was simply an honest gentleman—*bon compagnon*.

They got the dog cart twisted around—rather a perilous moment!—and the mare again between the shafts. "We shall be late for lunch," he said as they started.

"Thank Heaven!"

"You do not like lunch?"

"I do not like *table-d'hôte* meals. You are a master of persiflage, Monsieur de Belvalette."

"Surely my words are most harmless."

"It is your face."

"Madame, my face is the one sin I am not responsible for."

"That is a saying for a woman."

"I fear that no woman could ever say it. Your violets smell deliciously. How delightful to have a favourite flower! I have none."

"Butterflies haven't."

"Madame, you reproach me with being a butterfly. But when I speak of becoming domesticated, you reproach me yet more."

"Monsieur de Belvalette, what I reproach you with—but, no; I have no right to reproach you with anything. Pray choose your own flower!"

"Yet if, of your goodness of heart, in my forlornness, you would condescend, once for all"—he bent forward—"to advise me."

"Oh! I should bid you, of course, take the golden lily—*lilium auratum*—remember! After all, in the world of to-day there is nothing worth seeking, even for the sons of Crusaders, but stock exchange bankers' gold!"

"Thank you," he said quietly, and his dark cheek burned purple as if he had received a blow.

He reflected on the words again, when, seven hours later, he went up to his room to dress for dinner. In fact, they had hardly been out of his mind. Madame de Liancourt, he had heard, on returning from their too long drive had gone to lie down with a headache. He himself had not done much, beyond avoiding *tête-à-têtes* with the heiress.

"Of course," he said, standing by his dressing table, for on that dressing table lay an exquisitely arranged little nosegay of *Cypripedium* and maidenhair—a buttonhole. He knew that he was expected to wear *Cypripedium* that evening, for had he not the

night before, replying to Freddy's question, casually, carelessly answered that the "sweet little shoes of the goddess" were his favourite bloom! Had occasion offered, his choice would have varied. But, although he could not have missed the meaning of the proceedings at breakfast, he had hardly prepared himself for finding so palpable a hint on his table that evening. The immensity of its broadness disgusted him; and quietly, rather shamelessly, humming *Souvent femme varie* over and over again, he dressed with slow decision, ultimately arranging in his buttonhole, very deliberately, the violets he had brought back that afternoon and put in a glass.

There was a hum of expectation—a sudden hush amid loud laughter—as he entered the drawing-room. It was the thrill of curiosity which welcomed every guest that eventful evening, when the hotly perfumed air seemed charged with electricity. The whole room, amid its starry lights, seemed overloaded with brilliant blossoms; great pyramids and baskets of chrysanthemums and orchids shone out between the palms and ferns. Every woman wore her flowers like a challenge; every man saw in his an appeal. And each new entry was greeted with waves of contradictory feeling, for no one believed in a blind play of chance, most men knowing that in

their own case—and why not, then in others?—the colours had been as deliberately chosen as the favours of a cotillon. As Belvalette advanced a painful silence sank around him. Nobody wore violets. Frédégonde Schlopsmeyer, paler than usual, pulled at the cypripediums which covered the left side of her corsage.

“Is everybody here?” asked old Schlopsmeyer, protruding his white waistcoat, somewhat suggestive, in spite of its stiffness, only of grease.

As he spoke, Raoul de Liancourt hurried in with Lise. She wore white, and a great bunch of violets lay in the middle of her low-cut bodice.

“My dear Madame de Liancourt,” said Frédégonde Schlopsmeyer, “where did you find those exquisite violets? Nobody could have procured them; I never heard of them at this time of year. Surely you and Monsieur de Belvalette must have gone and gathered them together.

Lise, turning suddenly, saw, all of a tremble, Monsieur de Belvalette standing before her, coolly and calm.

“Madame,” he said, “I shall have the honour of taking you in to dinner. And I fear that you will be obliged to submit to the inexorable decree which makes me your

delighted partner for the rest of the evening."

"Is he mad?" asked Madame de Girondelle, furiously, of her cavalier, Monsieur de Liancourt.

"Do not ask me. Can I know what they have been up to?" answered, in anger, Monsieur de Liancourt.

"There are quantities of violets all along the river bank," said Lise. "Any one can pick them who chooses."

"Monsieur de Belvalette chooses," whispered Madame de Girondelle.

"Ah! it is pleasant to pick the violets—especially the violets, the humble, sweet violets—along the river bank!"

"*Tais-toi*," said Raoul.

But it was only toward the end of the evening that he went up to his wife, in the full flush of female envy and malice and universal acclaim.

"Well," he said, with a half-checked sneer, "you have more success than you ever could have bargained for!"

"Yes," she said, smiling, "more than I could ever have bargained for. Art thou content?"

He turned away without answering. She laid a hand on his arm. "Raoul," she said, "you must not let this talk of Monsieur de

Belvalette's marriage go further. He has not the slightest intention of proposing to Mademoiselle Schlopsmeyer."

"Indeed," he answered. "Well, you ought to know. I suppose he is too busy elsewhere."

OUR COUSIN SONIA.

OURS is a numerous family. That is to say, of course, in the strictest sense there is no one besides my sister and myself—I know of no other Martenses—but we seem to have cousins sprinkled all over our little world of Holland. Moreover, there are all my mother's French relations, whom I have known intimately from a child, and the South Bavarian branch of her family, distant in all three senses of the word, and—no, I fancy our cosmopolitanism ends there.

Unless I include “our cousin Sonia.”

Every family, like every dwelling house and every human personality, has a *côté hon-teux*. Circumstances and component parts exist which ourselves and our acquaintances tacitly combine to ignore. We are grateful to the latter for so doing, but not without vexation. Tom isn't dead (though he wishes he was), and they know he isn't. Yet only the weaklings among families are really afraid of the harm their prodigals can do them, nor do

they mind the prodigal's existence so long as he doesn't arrange a return. As for the daughters of a house—that's another matter. A prodigal daughter should instantly be given, as in Turkey, the sack.

Among our kindred Harry Brassy has long been the notorious black sheep. It was not always so. I remember how, in my own youth, little Harry was an affectionate object of interest to everybody. Old Karel Brassy—he was my mother's cousin, but considerably her senior—had, long before my time, lived all his lazy life, the egoist existence of a gentlemanly *roué*. He spent a good deal of money, but was somehow accredited with possessing more, the undefined inheritance of a stingy, silent father. Late in life, close on seventy, old Karel married a wife of thirty, with, it was reported, some thirty thousand pounds. But that may have been epigrammatic. They lived at The Hague in excellent style, and all the relations were much interested in their doings and in the development of that tender bud, their dear little, spoiled little Harry.

Old Karel lived to be more than eighty. His death made no palpable change in the circumstances of his wife and child. Mevrouw Brassy continued to reside at The Hague, where she kept open house in a dignified man-

ner; Harry passed from a private academy to the grammar school, and thence to Leyden University. Everybody liked the handsome widow and her bright, distinguished-looking son. The latter had many friends in Leyden in the best set; he was generous and open-handed; you never heard anything against him. I remember only too well how frequently Harry Brassy was held up to me as an example, because he was so pleasant spoken and friendly, and never saw anybody's faults. I did. Even my own. Alas, alas! Even my own.

When Harry had taken his degree and left the university (with a splendid farewell feast) his mother sent for him. He told me all this himself. He was then twenty-five, and a capital specimen of the wealthy, well-born young Dutch university man. He walked into her sitting-room one dull November morning and said: "Well, mother, here I am."

"Harry," replied the lady, smiling to him, "you must marry a large fortune within six months, please."

"Not within six months," he answered, laughing. "Father wasn't in such a hurry. He waited until he found *you*."

"He could choose, and you can't," she retorted, still smiling. "Within six months, or we shall both be sold up!"

"What do you mean?" He turned pale.

"Sold up; I haven't got any money left. Heaven knows, I made it last long enough, considering how little it was to begin with!"

"Little! I always thought we were rich!"

"So does every one else, thank God!"

He sat down and stared at her. "Do you mean to say that I am penniless?"

"Penniless! What a ridiculous expression! Like beggars with a baby. 'I—am penniless.' Of course we are not penniless. But we are bankrupt."

"But *my* money—the money father left me?"

She made a rapid movement with both hands like the upfluttering of birds.

"Gone!" she said. "Spent! You have spent it."

"Mother, you should have told me sooner. You have done wrong."

She burst into tears. "Wrong!" she cried. "My own child to tell me I have done wrong! Oh, the ugly, cruel word! Wrong! Do you know what I have done, unjust, ungrateful boy? My solemn duty to your dead father and you. I promised him upon his death bed," she sobbed, "and many a time before and after—no, I don't mean 'after,' but I've thought of it a hundred times, I mean—solemnly promised him to go on as he'd been doing, and to make the money last till you

could get some yourself. It's been a dreadful, dreadful strain. Many a time have I been obliged to go without a bonnet or a cloak!"

"A new one?" he suggested, smiling in his turn. "Never surely before you'd bought enough?"

She dried her tears. "A woman never has bought enough," she said; "not even when she buys too much." And then she laughed. "But we've really managed excellently," she said. "Now you will marry a wealthy wife, and we shall manage as well as ever."

"And supposing I don't?" he kicked moodily at a table leg.

"That would be very naughty of you, Harry. Very naughty and wilful. Then your poor, long suffering mammie would have to go to the workhouse, and all her pretty things would be sold to a horrid crowd by a horrid auctioneer! Dear me, if you don't intend to marry money, you must please stop spoiling that table at once!" She screamed with laughter at this idea, and her son joined in. Soon they were heartily enjoying themselves, tears of merriment in their light-blue eyes, as they worked out a comic picture of a public sale of their effects, speculating as to the value of all that was most old and rubbishy.

"Uncle John would be sure to purchase my *nightcaps*," said Mevrouw Brassy, shaking

in her seat. "There, that's as good a joke as ever I made in my life!" For she alluded to her brother's queer habit of tipping—with which this story has nothing to do. Harry laughed too; they were very gay, and thus he learned that he was poor.

The fact had little influence upon his way of living. He went out that same afternoon, after lunch, to buy a bouquet for the evening's ball, a bouquet for a young cousin just coming out. On the way home he dropped one of his gloves, and, letting it lie, called at the haberdasher's to order a dozen pairs. But he played high at the club before dinner, for the first time in his life. He won thirty-five pounds. The dinner and subsequent dance were exceedingly enjoyable; he got to bed in the small hours and slept like a top.

"I never enjoyed anything so much," he has often said, "as those thirty-five pounds. The first money I ever earned in my life."

For weeks matters went tranquilly on; neither mother nor son alluded to or reflected on the tiresome subject of finance. But Mevrouw Brassy reverted the more energetically to matrimony as a practical pursuit. She even went so far as to take preliminary steps in the direction of a certain most eligible young lady, when—

"My dear mother," said Harry, mildly

and firmly, laying a hand on her arm, "I will do anything and everything you like for you. But I won't marry a woman I'm not in love with at the time."

"How do you mean 'at the time'?"

"I may not be in love with her for ever, and I may not be in love with her at once; but I must be in love with her at the moment of our marriage."

"Why, unless you intend to remain in love with her for ever?"

"Intend? That, dear mother, as the Greeks used to say, lieth in the lap of the Gods. But one has the right, at least, to start fair. I am not going to marry any of the young ladies I know at this moment. Please don't mind."

"Not *one*, Harry?"

"No—nor two. Don't mind, please, mother."

"Oh, Harry!" She sat thinking for a few moments, then she said solemnly: "In that case nothing remains for me but to become seriously ill."

"Whatever do you mean, mother?"

"I can not stay at The Hague. I must need immediate change of air. My doctor recommends Montreux."

"Well, The Hague's a dull place at the best. I really can't help it, mother."

Mevrouw Brassy coughed.

"You don't do it very naturally," said her son.

"I must practise. Yes, I shall close the house. I must go to Montreux. You can take me."

She coughed, with daily improvement of tone, through the next few days; then, having been advised to get rid, by a change, of this chronic bronchial affection, she departed for the Lake of Geneva, and stopped coughing in the train.

Harry, who had never travelled otherwise than in the midsummer holidays, found the Grand Hotel des Rastaquouères very much to his taste. It is one of those huge, delightful menageries where you meet with the gayest of birds—ay, with the biggest beasts. There were toilets, for both sexes, by the shores of clear, placid Lemane, which showed it still to be a very contrasted lake. Harry blossomed out in glories unknown amid the tulip-beds of his native land. He walked with foreign counts and barons and talked of the doings—backstairs doings—of their respective princes and kings.

"You must marry here," said his mother.

"All right. There's no hurry."

"Indeed there is. People at home are beginning to ask questions. It's your bills."

"Oh! no one minds a young man's bills."

"True; but they say, 'He's of age, and so must have come into his father's money.'"

"Oh! never mind. Don't let's bother. There's a capital programme to-night. I wonder will that exquisite Roumanian girl be there?"

"I think I heard her say she was going. But, really, 'tis of no consequence."

However, it was. For the Roumanian girl brought a Russian friend, and the next thing we heard was that Harry "de" Brassy had married an enormously rich, wealthy young lady—a Russian, Sonia Pavlovich.

The "de" was his mother's doing. You really could not get on without it, she said, at the Grand Hotel des Rastaquouères.

It was all done in such a great hurry and secrecy, because Sonia had a rich uncle and godfather who would never consent to her marrying a Protestant, but would have to make the best of a *fait accompli*.

The next thing we heard was that the uncle refused to be reconciled. The next thing (much later) that he never had existed at all.

Harry troubled himself about none of these things. For a long time he was fully occupied buying the most beautiful presents for his bride. He ran across to Paris about a

diamond tiara. Incidentally, he answered Sonia one day that his title was "vicomte"—it was said in fun, there being no such rank of nobility in Holland—but their conversation was suddenly interrupted, and she told a lot of other people, and he found himself compelled to stick to what he had said.

"It does not matter twopence," declared his mother. "In these sort of places everybody pretends to be a great deal more than he is—excepting royalties, who pretend to be less. The high rank dropped by the sovereign may well be divided between some dozens of his subjects."

"How you reason things out!" replied Harry. "I suppose there's some sort of satisfaction in finding a reason for what one does. I never wanted to. I think 'vicomte' rather pretty. I shall have cards made with 'vicomte.'"

"Be cautious," said mamma.

He looked at her laughing. "Do you mean that?" he said.

She too laughed. "Well, no," she replied. "What nonsense! Why shouldn't everybody do as they like?"

"It's a good thing you don't mean it. Sonia's cards are ready. I found her sitting in the veranda with the whole hundred, or very nearly, spread out on the table in front of her."

"Sonia means Sophy, doesn't it? And Sophy means wisdom?"

"Yes."

"So much the better for you, my son."

"In the hotel veranda! Well, shall we go straight on, or turn?"

"Oh! turn to the left. I hate going straight on."

"Now, my dear boy, it is what I like best. One has always to think before turning."

"Oh, no! mother, I naturally drift aside."

"Now you are metaphysical. That is odious."

"Mother, I don't even know the meaning of the word."

"What? Metaphysical?"

"No—odious." He laughed again; never child had a more musical laugh. "When a man is in love and beloved he can only remember pretty words."

A smile rippled over Mevrouw Brassy's comely face. "I wonder," she replied, "what dear Sonia's old uncle will say?"

Dear Sonia's old uncle naturally said very little. But after a time the persistency of his silence began seriously to annoy Mevrouw Brassy, who, immediately after the wedding, had returned and reopened her house in The Hague.

She was bright and cheerful and amusing

as ever; people flocked to her reception, as they had always done, and tradesmen gave her credit as before. All of us heard much about the doings of the young vicomte and vicomtesse, who, at the desire of the bride, had soon migrated to Nice, where their intercourse with the gay and the great was duly recorded in the Riviera Gazette. "I quite agree with Sonia," declared Mevrouw at The Hague. "Montreux in the winter is eminently second-rate. You talk about princes and kings at Montreux, but you meet them at Cannes." This was *à propos* of Harry's intimate intercourse at the Cercle de la Réunion with an old royal highness as full of play as a puppy.

Much as we all liked Harry and his mother, eager as we had been to contradict as ridiculous any rumours of their possible insolvency, it can not be denied that the "vicomte" business, when it reached us, came with the unpleasant persistency of a shock. You could not get away from the awkward impression it left that this was the sort of thing respectable people, in Holland at least, do not do. Mevrouw Brassy ignored the whole business; had any one mentioned it to her she would doubtless have laughed and replied that the weather was seasonable. Meanwhile, the young couple led a brilliant and beautiful ex-

istence amid roses and diamonds, sunshine and glitter, while most of us envied them at home in the wet and the work.

"But Harry is the sort of man who is bound to succeed!" said all my women folk. And my wife, whose heart is as kind as if she had not brains enough to make it cruel, forbade my writing a funny account of the viscountcy to my cousins in Paris. A pity, for I felt I could have delighted the soul of, say, Lise de Liancourt. And of course they all heard it from somebody else.

"Charity covereth a multitude of sins," said my wife gently, as she arranged the blue tea-cups on the Dutch after-dinner tea-tray. The gusty wind of a shivery February evening beat wet against the window panes. I had just put on morocco slippers, a thing I never do.

"But that doesn't mean 'hideth,'" I objected.

"Yes, it does," replied my wife with decision, for no woman ever doubts her own Bible exegesis.

And no man ever contradicts her.

So as I silently sat glancing through the pages of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, there came that important ring at the front door, and before I had realized possibilities (in connection with those impossible slippers) an un-

known lady, very young, very pretty, rather wet, in an enormous magnificent travelling cloak stood before us in the middle of the room.

I rose to my feet. "I beg your pardon, madam," I began, "but——"

"Your cousin Sonia," she answered in French. "Don't scold your man."

"Madame Brassy!" exclaimed my wife, with her sweet smile of welcome.

"Even thus, Sonia de Brassy," replied our visitor, and, dropping the heavy cloak about her feet, stood revealed—a graceful, girlish figure, a faultlessly fitting dark tailor-made dress.

"And Harry?" ventured my wife a little timidly. "Where is Harry? Waiting outside?"

The Russian lady sat down on a convenient pile of cushions and burst into distressful tears. "Harry has treated me very cruelly!" she sobbed. "Harry has run away!"

"Run away!" we both exclaimed together.

"Run away!"

"Whither?" cried my wife.

I said nothing, for I couldn't say "With whom?"

"I don't know. He went suddenly from Paris; he left me a letter I will show you. He

told me to come here, and I came. Can you put me up for the night—one night?"

"Of course," said my wife with ready sympathy, and, quicker than I, went to ring the bell.

"But his mother!" questioned I; "Mevrouw Brassy—does she know?"

"Mamma-in-law? I can not go to her. She is very angry with me," replied the poor thing, and cried more copiously than ever.

Now, it is difficult for me to represent to myself Mevrouw Brassy, whom I know fairly well—you see, she married my mother's cousin—as very angry with any one, beyond a momentary outburst of passing passion. And I felt that in any case I could certainly never have continued indignant with so pretty and innocent and fluffy-haired a little girl.

"It is my fault," she said, when she had calmed down and sat, with her feet on the fender, drinking tea. "Yes, I had better confess at once; it is all my fault. But, then, you see, I loved him so"—her voice broke—"I couldn't bear to think of losing him. And I thought he was very rich, and his mother only wanted more—he said he didn't care—but his mother told me he *must* marry money, and so I invented my uncle."

"Invented your uncle!" I exclaimed.

"Oh! I know it was very wrong; but see,

I have been severely punished"—her long eyelids fell low on the soft pink cheeks. "Now he has no money, and I have no money—no, we have no money at all."

"Not what fine people like you call money," suggested my wife, with a smile.

Sonia lifted her eyes. "*Pas le sou*," she said. Both of us laughed again, one is so unwilling to admit poverty to others.

"And, see, here is his note!" said Sonia; she fumbled in a little reticule at her waist.

The little note, on pink perfumed paper—with a big coronet—read:

"DEAREST DARLING: I must leave you. Don't cry. I can not support you for the present. The shop-keepers are so disgustingly uncivil. We must separate. You had better go to my cousins, the Martenses, of whom I have so often told you. They are the kindest and nicest of all my relations. They will be good to you. HARRY."

I smiled on the wrong side of my face, with a mixture of complaisance and irritation.

"A disgraceful letter!" said my wife in Dutch. In French she remarked: "And, then, he was gone?"

Sonia began crying again, quite gently.

"Yes, he is gone. I know not where."

"Don't cry, I beg of you. Don't cry," I entreated, tortured. "You will stay here for the present, and I dare say he will soon come back." My wife cast me a quick look, very composite, but Sonia sat up and glanced all round the room.

"*Mon cousin*," she said, "those slippers go badly with evening dress." I blushed, furious, yet not ill pleased.

"Do you always say what you think, madame?"

"Always? No. But among cousins. Fie, how stiff! 'Madame!'"

"Let me show you your room," said my wife, rising.

"Oh, it will wait, will it not? I am so comfortable here. Yet, *au fond*, I should like to see my room—I know you will give me a good one. It is so nice, is it not?—a pretty bedroom, not big and old-fashioned and ugly. I always look for the sunniest room in a hotel."

"I fear we have not the choice of a hotel," replied my wife. "You should have come in the summer, when we are in the country——"

"Ah, that is true! He should have run away in the summer!" cried Sonia. She swept me a big courtesy, and followed the lady of the house.

"She preferred to remain upstairs; she is tired," said my wife on her return.

"You were rather unkind to her," I answered reproachfully.

My wife did not at once retort. Presently she said, over her needlework: "She wanted orange water. I have sent John out for some. And she also wants a cup of tea at half past ten, or she would not be able to sleep."

"Well, a cup of tea is a very little thing."

"It is." My wife's voice spoke volumes.

"She is exceedingly charming and pretty."

"She is."

"I wonder, is she going to stay?"

"She is."

"Well, that is very nice and pleasant."

No answer at all.

"It is," said I, imitating my wife's voice.

My wife looked up, laughing. "Don't say more than you can answer for!"

But I felt annoyed with her; women are too jealous of each other. "I have seldom seen so delightful and simple and elegant a creature," I said.

"Naturally, do not forget that she is the Vicomtesse de Brassy."

"Aha! You now find that convenient to remember!"

"Well, I hope that she won't do any harm to the children," said my wife.

"The children will adore her," I answered confidently.

The children did. For, indeed, she was sweet to children, laughing and playing and singing and dancing from morning till night. She asked me to get her some Dutch money—not in exchange for French—only a few hundred florins, she said. And she bought very pretty presents for the children, and also for my wife and myself. She spoke excellent French, with the pretty Russian burr. And soon she became a great favourite in our circle of friends. My wife found her rather heavy, and sometimes rather light. She was incapable of occupying herself in any way, by reading or working; she could only sing at the piano for hours, and that, in spite of her most beautiful voice, often had its objections. Also, she could interest herself, endlessly, in clothes, but not without some one to discuss them. When I saw her (never before lunch, for she breakfasted in her room) she was charming, exquisitely dressed, bright and sparkling, not averse to flirtation. I thoroughly enjoyed her magnificent singing. "Among women she is dull," said my wife.

When she had been with us more than a week I suggested that she should call on her mother-in-law, whom, but for the latter's indisposition (that troublesome cough), she

must have met long ago in society. To my astonishment, Sonia blazed out at me:

"Do not speak of her! I refuse to go near her, for shame, *mon cousin*."

"But still——"

"There is no 'but.' What have I to do with this woman and her son? They have betrayed me! I hate them! I have good reason to hate them. Do you not think?"—she looked at me—"that I have reason to hate them both?"

"Hate is such a strong word," I replied evasively.

"Do you think so? It is your Dutch blood says that. To me it is such a weak one. All my life I have wished for some person to invent proper words for the feelings I feel."

"Still, your mother-in-law——"

"It is to her I owe this miserable marriage. See, I am left to shift for myself—I am deserted!" She mastered her tears. "Ah, cousin, your family has much cause to make good to me all the wrong that my husband has done."

"Dear cousin, as long as you are happy here——"

"Happy? How can I be happy when I am destitute! I am like a beggar; I have not the means of subsistence. For these clothes

I have been obliged to get, in your elegant world——” I smiled with approval.

“Yes, they are overdressed,” said Sonia. “Well, unless I pay the milliners I shall have to go to prison.”

“How much money do you want?” I asked rashly.

“Eight hundred florins, *mon cousin*. Ah! thank you; you are a gentleman.”

What could I do? “Your husband does not communicate with you at all?” I said. “You have not written to him?”

“No, indeed, I have not written. Rather would I tear my eyes out. Would *your* wife—think you—write, *mon cousin*, if you had run away?”

“I suppose not,” I said, uncomfortably standing on one leg.

“What, are you preparing, at the mere suggestion, to fly? Oh, you men! But no; you are not of the kind that betrays. Anna is happy!” She lifted her pocket handkerchief to her eyes. “Never mind, I too am happy in having found so generous a relation. At least, I am saved from the *bagno*.”

“Don’t tell my wife,” was all I could reply.

A week later I certainly began to understand the latter lady’s smothered impatience. But the poor little deserted foreigner was so pathetic, so childishly incapable and harmless

that we could not find it in us to be otherwise than kind to her. Still, we greeted with a restrained alacrity her vague proposals of departure to stay with some other cousins—first cousins those—whom she had met and much liked at our house.

“You would not,” she asked anxiously, “think it unkind of me to go?”

I said yes, I should think it unkind; but Sonia was looking at my wife.

At that moment I was called out of the room, because the postman was waiting to see me. “Here’s a letter come back, Mynheer,” said the postman in the hall; “a registered letter they couldn’t deliver in England. The gentleman had left.” I glanced at the envelope he extended. It was addressed to “Henry Brassy, Esq.,” at some district post office in London.

“It was registered by a lady who said she was only passing through,” continued the postman; “but they think at the office she’s been staying with you, sir.”

“She is here still,” I replied, admiring for the dozenth time the perfection of our postal arrangements. “I will get this receipt signed for you;” and I went back to Sonia with the letter.

She blushed crimson when she saw it. “Ah, my poor little letter!” she cried.

"Cousin, I have followed your advice—I have written! I registered the letter to an address he once gave me in London. See, it has not reached him. My poor little pitiful letter! Well, it was madness to send it! The madness of despair."

"But it wasn't properly addressed," said I, pointing to the superscription.

"Oh, he has told me always to do that. You know how stupid they are in England about foreign addresses. Well, it is no use; he is not there." She gathered up her papers and hurried away.

"He is masquerading in London under a false name," said my wife.

"Not under a false name. Don't be illogical," I replied irritably.

My wife nodded her head. "That is why the letter has not reached him," she said. "He has changed his name. I always knew that she wrote to him, and now she has sent him money. I hope it wasn't much?" She looked up into my face.

"Not too much," I answered, and made good my escape. When we next saw Sonia her eyes were red. I felt very sorry for her. Of late they had often been so.

That evening we had some people to dinner. Sonia was beautifully dressed, I thought; my wife says she had not nearly so many new

dresses as I imagined, but she possessed an admirable aptitude for draping and combining them, so that to male perceptions, which absorb the *ensemble*, she seemed everlastingly fresh.

After coffee Sonia sang. She sang more superbly than I had ever yet heard her, chiefly pathetic love songs, French and German, and some of her own exquisitely passionate Slav music, so unlike ours. I can still feel the tears in her glorious soprano as they seemed to fall, one by one, on my heart:

“Ach, um Deine feuchten Schwingen,
West, wie sehr ich Dich beneide!
Denn du kannst ihm Kunde bringen,
Was ich in der Trennung leide!”

She bore on, trembling with emotion, to the end. As the last note died away, a thrill of pent-up ecstasy ran through the company. A moment later one of the greatest connoisseurs of the country was complaining, almost bitterly, to the performer that circumstances prevented her from becoming a professional.

“It is a loss to the world,” he said.

“So I have heard before,” replied Sonia naïvely; “but of course people never meant it.”

“I mean it.”

"A pleasant future you would prepare for madame," said another man; "a public singer!"

The first speaker turned angrily.

"You don't know what you're talking of," he cried; "you are twenty years behind. Look at Patti, Nilsson, half a dozen others, bathing in millions, fêted by all the sovereigns of Europe!"

"Oh, the half dozen!" replied the other, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Yes, it is that I am afraid of," interrupted Sonia, who had listened eagerly; "the being second-rate. That, as a position, is pitiable!"

The connoisseur looked at her sharply.

"You would be of the first half dozen, madame," he answered. Somebody called me away, but I noticed that these two continued talking together for some time.

"Oh, of course, she sings admirably," said my wife, when all the guests were gone and we stood comparing notes in the empty drawing-room.

And then she made some allusion to *chantage*. A pun from her lips is the rarest of pearls; I felt she must be strongly excited.

"Hush!" I said, for the door had creaked and Sonia entered the room, clad in some exquisite white wrapper.

"I can not sleep," she said, trembling from head to foot. "I want to talk to you both."

I led her to a chair and tried to soothe her, as one might a frightened child.

"I can not stand it any longer," she said. "I—I must go back to him." And, spreading both her hands across her face, she burst into a storm of weeping.

"I love him so!" she sobbed. "I love him so!"

Then my wife went up to her, and, putting both her arms round her neck, kissed her between the curls upon her forehead.

"No, no," continued Sonia, gently putting the comforter aside; "I want to tell you *all*. You have been good to me. It is a shame. See, it was a plot. When we found we had no money left, he said: 'I will go and make some. A man can always manage. A woman is different. You must go,' he said, 'to my Dutch relations and say I have deserted you. They will take you in, and if you can get some money from them you might send me what you do not want.' That is what we arranged together, and we wrote the letter. See, when you turned me out, I was to have gone to another." Her pretty cheeks were burning. Her sorrow and shame would have melted a stone.

"Old Madame Brassy ought to be ashamed of herself," said my wife, with ready insight.

And suddenly Sonia laughed.

"Yes; I fear," she said, "we have all been very, very naughty. But mamma-in-law is as poor as we. Heaven only knows how she manages to hang on."

"She doesn't even pay her butcher," explained my wife. I looked up, surprised at this bit of information.

"Serves the wicked, expensive butcher right!" said Sonia. "But don't interrupt me, please. For now I have thought of a way to put everything straight; I am so happy! We want lots of money, all of us; we can't do without money, please! I am going to sing in concerts and—and on the stage. I shall earn heaps of money—not at once, of course, but some at once, and afterward more. I shall study hard, and learn things properly. I think I can act already—a little." She looked up shyly at me.

"You can," I answered.

"Thanks, *mon cousin*. You were always charming. It will be just the kind of life we shall like, just the kind that will suit us. There will soon be lots of money, I hope, to spend, and to waste, which is almost nicer! And—joy!"—oh, the leap in her voice—"it is I shall gain money for Harry! He never

could earn any for himself, poor boy. And yet he would have married me poor!"

"Where is Harry?" asked my wife severely.

"In London. I think he has had rather a—successful run at cards. I do hope he is having a good time."

My wife gave such a gasp that I laughed.

"But when I am a *prima donna* I shall not allow him to play, excepting just for fun." She rose and walked to the door. "Well, now I have told you all. *Mon cousin*, you must leave me the use of this money. I will repay it. I am going to begin at once; as soon as Harry sends me his new address. I shall write to him to join me in Paris. Is it not a beautiful plan, *mon cousin*?"

"I think it is very wrong," said my wife. "The stage!"

"But you, *mon cousin*?" asked Sonia pleadingly.

"God bless you, child!" said I. She closed the door hastily between us.

"What did you say to her?" questioned my wife.

"I said, 'God bless you.'"

"Well," replied my wife reflectively; "well, well! One can always say that."

These things did not happen yesterday. Sonia—her name wasn't Sonia—is a bright

operatic star. She and her husband, never far distant from his mother, live in reckless luxury all over Europe. In private life he is known as the Vicomte de ——: the name wasn't Brassy.

DIANE DE BRAGADE.

THE first time I met Madame de Bragade she said the worst thing I have ever heard fall from a woman's lips.

It was at a big dinner party, and I had the honour of sitting next to her. She had especially asked (as I afterward heard) that it should be so, because I "liked literature," and she had never before met a gentleman who liked literature.

She sat next to me, then, and I felt flattered, for she is the reigning beauty of our little big world. Undeniably she is a beautiful woman. A little massive perhaps for so youthful a Juno, but magnificently formed. She knows it. All during dinner she kept her elbow on the table between us, and played with her ear or the flowers in her hair. The arm and hand, I admit, were most exquisitely moulded. But the intention was too evident.

"You have children, I think," I had said, *à propos* of something or other. She turned lazily; she was all white lace and rubies, with warm flesh tints and great coils of dark hair.

"Oh, yes!" she said slowly. "I don't care about children. I've got thirteen dogs."

The words, of course, might have been a sort of jest or bravado; they were not; they were deadly earnest. She meant them.

I have heard many women say many things they meant or did not mean. Often it is difficult to tell. But to hear a mother say she does not like children is to receive a lesson in human depravity such as leaves its scar for ever upon the heart.

I am a cynic, as all men know, and I smiled. "Do all your thirteen dogs," I said, "lie in their lady's lap?"

She glanced at me quickly; I only smiled. I had guessed aright. Among her thirteen dogs she had included two favoured human ones that dangled at her feet.

These pages will not tell the story of Diane de Bragade. She has yet to live it. All I can give is a column of tit-bits; she would be delighted to scan my paragraphs; she shall not have that pleasure. She would like to think she had caused me pain.

There are men and women in the world whose only pleasure is this causing of pain. The men are very rare, thank God!—the women are rarer. But the woman, when she occurs, has by far the deadlier bite.

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Madame de Bragade enjoyed giving pain because it showed her strength. Her worship—the one thing she loved—was physical strength, first in herself, then in men or brutes. The strength of beauty, the strength of muscle, the strength of hardness and obstinacy and cruelty—all these she was eager to recognise; for the strength of intellect she had no appreciation; the power of goodness she thought to be a copy-book rule. She had never intentionally done anything because it was wrong—or right.

Her parents had married her early to the Count de Bragade. He was twenty years her senior. Their positions were pretty well equal (no, hers was the higher; her name is one of the greatest in Europe); his fortune was ample; their relatives approved of the marriage; there was absolutely nothing to keep them apart. He preferred the country, she preferred the town. There was absolutely nothing to keep them together. People got into hardly inquiring after M. de Bragade. At least her people did. Because their tastes were dissimilar, she soon accustomed herself to consider him a nonentity. But he was not. He was an amiable country gentleman, with many interests and mild pursuits, fairly well educated, not unintelligent, fond of his children and of all innocent creatures that look

to you for help. He was one of those men who quietly do their duty in that sphere in which God has placed them. And that is a thing which some women *can not* stand.

Diane de Bragade believed that a man's duty was to fight for her, to kill himself for her, to fight her also, perhaps, if that proved necessary. She would not have minded, possibly—had the occasion become imperative—doing some violent hurt to herself. But she loved her beautiful body, and would have been slow, in any case, to recognise a tragedy, had one come, as it never did, into her life.

Meanwhile the comedy of human errors, saddest of plays, crept into that life and developed scene after scene. There was little continuity, but no break.

When Monsieur de Viroflay first came out in our society he was told that he must pay his court to the Comtesse de Bragade. He said that he did not want to; she frightened him. By some mischance only the first half of this sentence reached the lady. From that moment Hector de Viroflay was lost.

I was sorry for him, because I had liked his sister. It is strange how men's regard for each other—I am excluding intimate friendships—is almost entirely dependent on their estimate of each other's sisters, mothers, and wives. Great dislike of any married woman,

for instance, is almost enough to make a man harbour a sneaking affection for her husband. It was hard on Jean de Bragade that no mortal male could by any chance greatly dislike Jean's beautiful wife.

"My ambition," said Diane to whoever would hear her, "is to be hated by all women and loved by all men." She had her wish—aye, and more. Of the men who loved her, half hated as well. Hate is a very different thing from dislike.

When Viroflay's words were reported to Madame de Bragade her eyes flashed; she sat up and told Mayeux to fetch the young man immediately. Jaques de Mayeux, being the favoured *cavalière servente* of the moment, obeyed with a scowl. It was at a small costume ball, an exquisite affair, that this first meeting occurred. There was nothing tragic or even remarkable about it; de Viroflay, though perhaps a fortunate man, could hardly be called a lucky one, for his fate was the common fate of all. He realised this, as he stood bowing before Diane, looking gallant enough in his dress of a Crusader (an "ancestor," needless to say).

Diane, who knew nothing of mythology, had come as Venus Anadyomene—not a mistake in this Diana, who already, at twenty-five, looked more like a Juno. Thus were the

goddesses blended; for Diana, we all know, was a huntress, and Juno was married, and Venus loved Mars. Diana was also chaste, and Juno safeguarded the sanctity of the home; but a mortal can not expect to combine all the attributes of a goddess, especially not all the attributes of three.

She sat, then, on a great sea-blue mantle in the garb of the Anadyomene. Except the water drops—which may have been well worth a million—her costume can hardly have cost more than a few dozen francs.

“I hear,” she said, “that you have declared that you were unwilling to make my acquaintance?”

“I was afraid of you,” replied the young officer, almost in a whisper. But spoken to, and not of, a woman, those words of course sound like a compliment.

“You are not so brave as your costume,” she said, smiling. “The strong men of old were not afraid of women, I should think.”

“Had Samson been so,” replied Hector, “all the better for him.”

“Samson—is that mythology? You must not talk cleverly to me, Monsieur de Viroflay. I have forgotten all about my mythology, except that it was very improper.”

“Why should you remember about other goddesses?” he answered.

She smiled approval. "I have frequently been told," she said, "that you ride superbly. I should like to see you ride. It is the one physical exercise a woman cares to see a man excel in. All the others we appreciate, of course, but they leave us indifferent. Except boxing, perhaps? I do not know"—her eyes filled with regret—"I have never seen a boxing match."

"It is a nasty sight, madame."

"Opinions differ. I should have thought you too heavy a weight for a cavalry officer. Oh, I like big men! Well, when could I see you ride?"

For five minutes more they talked about horses; when they parted, it was settled that Diane should call at Dubriel's next morning, there to see Hector's famous Firefly go through her famous paces. "Come in your armour, sir knight," she said.

"Ah, madame," he said, bowing as low as his corselet would let him, "no armour avails against Venus unarmed."

Jaques de Mayeux, coming up to claim his partner, flung a frown like a whip-cut across the Crusader's face. Hector turned red. A few minutes later the two men met by the buffet.

"A word with you, sir," said Mayeux. "You may possibly have heard that I have

considered myself obliged to fight two duels in the last three months? I dislike duels; they are fussy. But I am resolved to fight any number."

"You are utterly mistaken, sir," replied Viroflay, with some haste; "I have not the slightest intention of poaching on other people's preserves."

"Preserves!" Mayeux smiled bitterly, but he moved off in silence. He was out and away the best fencer of our club.

He accompanied Madame de Bragade on the following day to Dubriel's. That was only natural; he accompanied her everywhere. She laughed in his face. "All the same—what I like, when I like, where I like, as I like!" she said.

But with Hector's riding, which really is first rate, she was unfeignedly delighted. The soft smell of the riding school, the soft light, the soft footfall of the galloping mare, the soft silk of her shiny, richly veined skin, the soft gleam of her expectant eye—these brought home all the more to Diane the superb reserved strength of the horse and the rider. Viroflay is a big man, with a great appearance of force; the mare, too, was a powerful brute, in spite of the clean curve of her delicate ankles; her little round feet were a dream of delight.

Madame de Bragade kissed her twice on the neck. De Mayeux turned hot and cold. "If you kiss that beast again," he said, "I shall run her owner through the chest."

She did not take her eyes from the horseman leaping in the distance over a bar, as she quietly answered: "Let us understand each other once for all, *mon cher*. You said something of the kind once before about Rosly. You are a bully, and you think to bully me, which is impossible. Whether it is possible for you to bully Monsieur de Viroflay, I do not know. But you shall not bully me through him or through any one else—do you understand?"

"Which means?" asked Mayeux, white to his tightly contracted lips.

"Ah, you are a fool! The man who asks a woman what she means always is. It means that the moment I think you have interfered between me and any one else I never, on any account, speak a word to you again."

"That at least is explicit, Diane. Had you said it sooner, three months ago——"

"They bored me. And a man should be able to defend himself."

"In other words, I may interfere when they bore you."

"Undoubtedly, if you then still think it worth your while. Do you wish me to tell

you when the moment is come?" She spoke the last words with a palpable sneer, as Monsieur de Viroflay came cantering up. Then she patted Firefly's neck with her ungloved hand, and deliberately kissed the animal again.

"Monsieur de Viroflay," she said, "next autumn you must come to us at Sablières for some shooting. We have very fair shooting, have we not, Monsieur de Mayeux? My husband is a capital shot; that, at least, is a taste we have in common."

She paid no attention to Hector's reply. "Monsieur de Mayeux," she said presently, "pray do me the favour to see if my carriage is there."

Jaques beckoned to one of the stable hands. A red fury flamed across Diane's fair cheek. "Monsieur de Viroflay," she said, "perhaps you would not mind taking the trouble."

In three gigantic bounds the horseman leaped across the immense inclosure into the dark of the entry. Without further word or look Madame de Bragade went slowly after him. It was only in the carriage that she said to Jaques de Mayeux:

"*You bore me. That*, evidently, requires plain speaking to be understood."

Perhaps it was on account of this that she got Hector de Viroflay to join her at Sab-

lières before there was any question of autumn shooting. He came in the middle of the summer, a month after the Grand Prix. Sablières lies a couple of miles from Bardonne, in the heart of the Gardenage; it is almost superfluous, therefore, to praise its beautiful surroundings. It could not have many attractions for Diane, who was quite insensible to any of the beauties of inanimate nature. But she liked its solitudes, being able to people them as she chose. Her husband was constantly at Sablières with the children. He greeted her at the little station on her arrival from Paris in a compartment full of dogs.

"How is Philippe?" she asked. "Is his whooping-cough better? Yes? I am very glad of it. Poor little fellow! Do you know, Jean, I was almost afraid to bring Joey! Those little gray monkeys, the veterinary surgeon was telling me, are exceedingly subject to whooping-cough."

"Philip is much better," said Jean.

"Of course. It isn't dangerous for children, but it always kills little gray monkeys."

"At one period the doctor feared he might suffocate," said Jean.

"Then why did you not send for me?" she exclaimed indignantly. "But doctors always assert that sort of thing for the sake of their own glory and the bill."

"I expected you to say as much," replied her husband quietly. "That is why I did not send."

"Jean, you have a most unpleasant manner of expressing things."

"I assure you, it is quite unintentional."

"That makes it all the more hopeless." She shrugged her shoulders. "I have asked Monsieur de Viroflay—Hector, the officer—to join us down here."

"Alone?"

"No; some other people are coming next week, are they not? Your sisters, I believe, and possibly your mother." She sighed.

"Not my mother, I fancy," he answered, with a dark flush on his cheek.

"Not your mother?"

"Diane, you remember that when she stayed with us last Christmas she said she would never come again."

"Angry women say many things, especially angry old women. But of course your mother will do as she thinks best."

"Yes. I shall go and stay with her next month for a little and take the children. She adores the children."

"Naturally. What grandmother does not? I believe when I am a grandmother I shall 'adore the children.'"

"And this Monsieur de Viroflay, when does he come?"

"To-morrow morning. I shall fetch him at the station. I detest this sort of carriage in which one can not drive one's self."

"I took the brake, because I thought you would like to have the dogs with you."

"So I do, thanks. But to-morrow I shall have only one spaniel, and he can sit next to me in the phaeton."

Jean did not consider this remark called for any further reply.

Next morning he greeted Monsieur de Viroflay with no excessive enthusiasm, but also with no lack of courtesy. He had a safe habit of leaving his guests to their own devices and Diane's. As for himself, he was immersed in petty business, which he transacted admirably—the local paper was loud in his praise—and he found plenty of time to teach Jeannot, his eldest, aged seven, how to shoot with a popgun and sit a small pony, while yet he did not neglect the somewhat inferior claims of Philippe and Dodo.

"I don't think Jeannot has grown," she said, inspecting the small boy before her—a small boy in yellow curls, black eyes, and blue velveteens. "I hope he will not remain little like you, Jean."

"I am not of the littlest," replied Jean, nettled.

"Nor of the biggest," she answered, with a quick glance at Hector de Viroflay. "No matter, though of course one would like him to grow tall, as long as he becomes manly and strong. I do hope he will not grow up a nincompoop. Jeannot, you would not like to be a nincompoop?"

"A what?" asked the child.

"A nincompoop. A zany. I should hate you if you did grow up like that!"

"Would papa hate me too," asked the boy, "if I grew up a nincompoop?"

"Most certainly," interposed his mother with vivacity, a faint flush on her cheek.

"I should not like to grow up a nincompoop," said Jeannot.

"Yet there is every danger," continued Diane, irritated, addressing her husband. "Run away, Jeannot, and play with the others. I am sure that you coddle him. The other day, in Paris, you were far too anxious about his coat."

"He is learning to ride," replied Jean sharply—Monsieur de Viroflay had been carried off by Jeannot to see the pony—"he is not a strong child. I do not coddle him half so much as you coddle your little gray monkey."

"Coddling is good for monkeys."

"So be it. Would you wish me, Diane, to leave the coddling of the children to you?"

"No, undoubtedly it is better in your hands. I will do what I can to make a man of Jeannot."

"How?"

"Let me go my own way. By teaching him not to be afraid."

"How?" The anxiety in his voice had increased; an imperious note also had come into the reiteration, which moved her to resentment.

"Do I know?" she answered. "By making him face danger when it comes."

"When it comes," he repeated. "That is right. Diane, listen to me. I forbid you—to do you understand me?—to run any of your mad risks with Jeannot. I forbid you."

"You forbid me?" She lay back in her chair, half closing her eyes.

"I forbid you. You are not accustomed to such words. It is indeed regrettable that they should fall between husband and wife; that there should be any occasion for them——"

"It is absurd," she interrupted.

"I grant you. But it is unfortunately, in my opinion, inevitable. You will leave the children alone. I leave you alone."

She did not answer. After a moment he continued: "In some ways, of course, my position is ridiculous; I admit it, yet I do not think I am exactly a comic husband of the stage. With full consciousness, and deliberate consideration, I leave you alone. I will have no *esclandre* connected with my name, my mother's name, my children's name. But I am not, as you often appear to imagine, an absolute cipher. I command you to leave the children alone!" His voice rang out. He stood before her, his fists clenched tight down by his side.

"Bravo!" she exclaimed, her eyes kindling. "I like you like that, Jean; why do you not oftener show me that phase of your character? Like that you are adorable!"

He laughed wearily. "You should have married a trooper," he said.

"*C'est vrai*," she answered. That was all. He strolled away with his hands in his pockets. She went to look for the others, some one to talk to—she could never be one moment alone. She found Hector and Jean—not in the stables and carried them off for a walk.

"Where is papa? He likes walking?" said Jeannot, preparing to start.

"Papa is with Jeambi," replied his mother at a guess.

"He is always with Jeambi," exclaimed Jeannot. Jean Bonami, surnamed Jeambi, was a great personage in the Brigade household—a sort of confidential henchman, without any of the wit or the insolence so often ascribed to old family servants. He did for de Brigade exactly as much as de Brigade did not wish to do for himself.

The trio started, accompanied as usual by a half-dozen dogs.

"Jeannot," said the countess, moved by some unadmitted compunction, "in what direction would you like to go? You shall choose your walk yourself."

"I should like to go down by the rocks," said Jeannot immediately, for no reason whatever. So they went toward the rocks, a beautiful walk through sun-dotted pine forests, ending in a sudden blaze of poppy-covered meadow over a steep descent of precipice. Far away sank the vine-trellised champaign, with a riband of river entangled across it, under the wide blueness of heaven.

"What a horrible fall," remarked Hector, turning away.

"Does that sort of thing not tempt you to jump?" replied Diane.

"By no means. Does it you?"

"To madness. I must restrain myself. Now those blue flowers down yonder, I

should love to climb down and get them, just for the danger of the descent."

They hung over the cliff; the child hung over too.

"They are a beautiful blue," said Diane.

"I have never noticed you care for flowers. I don't believe you do," said Viroflay.

"I love flowers. Did you ever meet a woman who didn't?"

"I never met a woman who dared to say she didn't."

"Well, I think those blue blossoms are exquisite. I should like immensely to have them."

"Nobody can reach them."

"Nobody? Pooh! a child could."

"Possibly; but even this looking down turns me sick. I have the *vertige de l'abime*. I can not help myself. It is in the family."

"Nonsense. What a fancy! Jeannot,"—it was the impulse of a moment—"you could scramble down, could you not, and get some of those blue flowers for mamma?"

"Yes," replied Jeannot, and began to descend a little bit of pathway, two of the dogs barking madly at the top.

"The child will fall," said Viroflay.

"That was what your mother said, I suppose," replied Diane. "It is when children have been accustomed from their childhood

to danger that they do not shirk it in after life."

Hector de Viroflay did not answer; he remembered what he had said when first told to go and pay court to Madame de Bragade.

Even as the mother spoke, the boy slipped and fell down several yards of the precipice, rolling over and over, clutching at various things, not crying out. The next moment he stopped himself, clinging to a shrub, and hung, silent, in a desperate position. The dogs at the top barked more furiously than ever.

"You must save him," said Diane, white to the lips.

"I will do my utmost," answered Viroflay, with a shrug of the shoulders.

The child's cry came up to them: "Papa!"

Viroflay prepared to descend, with the nervous hesitation of a man who is anxious to do what he can not. He excelled where he was sure of success; when doubtful of his powers he was powerless. "*Enfin!*" he said, and planted one cautious foot far below the other.

All the dogs now stood drawn up along the edge, barking louder than ever. Madame de Bragade hung over it, crying words of endearment and encouragement to the child.

"It is useless! I can not," came up Viro-

flay's voice. "Diane, I see nothing; I am giddy; black stars swim before my eyes!"

Then more faintly: "Everything is turning around me. God! I can not even save myself!"

With a cry she sprang down among the bushes, swung herself from one to the other, fell, her face full of scratches, caught at a branch, swung down lower—the deserted animals above ran to and fro, howling and barking. The boy's call came up fainter: "Papa!"

A man's figure appeared on the height, clear cut against the brilliant sky. Jean de Bragade, emerging from the pine wood, had crossed the meadow with a sudden rush; he now stopped one moment for breath, then slowly and firmly descended, looking neither to the right nor left, down to Jeannot. He took the boy in his arm and began painfully to climb upward, gasping beneath the weight, pausing constantly, working with hands and knees, bidding the boy to cling close to him—a terrible journey which he will remember all the rest of his life. At the last moment, as he was nearing the summit, a piece of rock, loosened by all this commotion, broke away and came rolling toward them, making straight for Jeannot's curly head. The father, in that moment, threw up his arm instantly to ward off the blow; the stone struck against his

wrist, which dropped helpless. Half unconscious, yet retaining his nerve, doing what was necessary, though hardly aware how he did it, Jean dragged Jeannot over the edge, and sank down on the grass in a faint. A couple of men were hurrying across the meadow attracted by the dogs.

When Diane had succeeded in getting Viroflay up on to *terra firma* again, she also, from exhaustion and agitation, lost consciousness. A few minutes later she recovered, to find herself the centre of a curious group of peasants, and Hector de Viroflay bending over her, a glass of water in his hand. She took the glass from him, and, before the astonished yokels, dashed its contents in his face.

"Coward!" she said, and at once, rising, turned her back upon him for good. "Where is Monsieur le Comte?" she asked. "Where is Monsieur Jean?"

The two were at a cottage close by, near the road. A carriage had been sent for from the house.

She walked thither with more or less steady step. A couple of women at the door stood aside to let her pass. Her husband lay on a sort of improvised couch, on a red and black table-cloth. His face was drawn with pain; the right wrist lay useless by his side; it was broken. Beside him sat Jeannot, the

muddy tears dry on his cheeks, telling, circumstantially, out of Hans Christian Andersen, the long story of the "Marsh King's Daughter." Madame de Bragade filled the room with her dogs.

"Can I do anything for you, Jean?" she asked helplessly. He nodded a negative. Jeannot, with a frightened glance at his mother, went on telling the tale of Helga, the cruel. The peasant owners of the cottage listened apathetically. "I think it is a lovely story," said little Jean in the middle; "don't you think it's a lovely story, papa?"

"Lovely," replied the father sadly. Madame de Bragade played with her colley. So they waited. At last the sound of wheels was heard; a victoria drew up at the door, and Jeambi came hurrying in with restoratives, bandages, a black neckerchief for a sling, any number of comforts for the invalid. As soon as the latter was ready to move, Diane stepped forward and offered him her arm. With a quick look at the curious eyes round the doorway he passively allowed her to assist him to the carriage. Its horses had barely started before she broke out in her impetuous way:

"Jean! ah, my husband! my brave! Ah, it was splendid of you—it is thus that I love you, my Jean! I have wronged you. You are

better than all these others! Jean, why do not you speak to me, Jean?"

But he looked into the distance and toward the background, as if watching for something.

"You will hurt your arm," she began. But he stopped her. They were alone in the forest, not far from the house; there was no longer a soul in sight.

"We will get out, Jeannot and I," he said in a voice of command. Jeambi turned on the box seat with attempted deprecation. His master took no notice.

"I would rather walk," said Jean, still very white. "The walk will do us both good. Jeambi, I can lean on your arm. François will drive Madame la Comtesse to the house."

He got out, with some little difficulty, as if still feeling feeble and giddy. The boy jumped after him. Diane de Bragade sat alone in the carriage, watching them. She saw Jean turn aside through the trees to a footpath, leaning heavily on Jeambi's arm, with Jeannot on Jeambi's right, clinging close to the old man's hand.

MADAME DE MERSY.

AFTER a moment's hesitation the lady's maid opened the bedroom door.

"Madame la Marquise will pardon me," began the lady's maid, "but the groom of the chamber says that a gentleman waits downstairs who insists that he must speak with Madame la Marquise."

Denise de Mersey half turned; her golden head made an aureole against the shadows about the cot.

"The doctor!" she exclaimed in an undertone, not untouched with impatience. "But my orders were surely explicit to show up the doctor at once!"

"It is not the doctor, Madame la Marquise"—the maid hesitated—"but some one of the family—a relation——"

"I can see no one to-night. Is the child then not ill? Who is it?"

"Some one that is anxious to surprise Madame la Marquise. Fie, then, is the little angel not already asleep? Can her faithful

Valérie not watch a few minutes, while Madame la Marquise descends?"

Madame de Mersey rose unwillingly. "Yes, the child is asleep," she said. "I will go down and see who is this. If she wakens or coughs again you must call me." She passed out of the room—in that many-chambered Paris mansion her bedroom and the child's.

With a grin Valérie took the vacant seat and drew from her pocket the napoleon she had just received and twirled it between finger and thumb till it caught a ray from the night lamp; then, smiling, she put it back again.

Madame de Mersy went downstairs, and the *maître d'hôtel*, who had pocketed two napoleons, flung open the drawing-room door.

"Paul!" exclaimed Madame de Mersy. In her voice there rang every emotion of pleasure and annoyance and anxiety that a woman can combine in one note.

A young naval officer, a striking stalwart figure, stood under the chandelier.

"Yes, Paul," he said.

"You have come back? And your ship was to sail to-morrow. Why this mystery?"

"Perhaps you would have refused to admit me, had you known it was I."

"Why, pray, should I refuse to admit you?"

"Ah! why, indeed? There is no reason."

"Paul, when you took leave of us last night it was for good."

"So I thought; and yet, see, I have come back."

"But why? Is there anything wrong?"

"Oh, no," he said, "there is nothing wrong."

She did not sit down, nor did she invite him to do so.

"Robert is out," she remarked. "He is dining with his sister de Praville."

"Your husband? He is out? I have nothing to do with him."

"Paul!"

"You and I, we knew each other as children. We were cousins; we played together, always—we loved each other! Long before any one had heard of Monsieur de Mersy."

"Paul, I can not stay talking here; Simone is unwell. I must go to her."

He looked up for the first time. "Unwell?" he said quickly, and no woman could have withstood the swift sympathy of his voice.

"I do not imagine it is anything serious. I have sent for the doctor. This moment I am expecting him."

"Listen to me first. I too am a sufferer, of your own flesh and blood. I too have a claim on your sympathy—a double claim—for the suffering is through you."

She moved back a pace, and her fingers touched the door knob.

"I must speak!" he went on violently. "And you will listen for one last moment!" Her hand slipped from the handle. "Why, pray, do you think I am come back, having gone? My ship sails for Tonkin to-morrow. I shall possibly never see you again; I had taken leave of you last night in the presence of your husband. I was gone, gone safely—why have I come back?"

"Hush!" said Madame de Mersy, very pale in her pale evening-dress gown, her fair hair a yellow cloud about the whiteness of her skin. He stopped and stared at her.

"We have known each other," she continued tremulously, "as you say, ever since we were little children. We are cousins; we have always been excellent comrades, friends. Last night you came here and took leave of us—possibly, as you say, we may never meet again. If we do not, let us always remember that we parted now."

"But, Denise——"

"Before you had ever said anything to me

which at any time you need have reason to regret."

He took a few paces away from her, and then came back close.

"Never," he burst out, "never said anything? Ah, but it is you that are slow to understand! I have said it a hundred times—twenty years have passed since I first longed to say, since I first began saying it. I have said—I have said—Denise, I am saying it now!" His heart throbbed; she could hear it, and the gasp in his throat. She leaned against the door, her hand playing nervously with the lock.

"Denise, have you nothing to answer me? Ah! I do not ask you to speak. Only look at me—look at me once, before I go."

She kept her eyes on the floor. "Good-bye," she said. "Paul, you never should have come."

"I know that," he replied; "'tis my reason for coming—my only excuse."

"Any moment the doctor may be here. I must go to Simone." And still she kept her eyes on the floor.

"Denise"—he bent even nearer—"do you know why I ventured to come back to-night? You are angry with me. I had wanted not to tell you. But I can not bear your anger, not at this our last meeting—I

can not bear to leave you angry. I can not—Denise, the possibility is the certainty. I am going to Tonkin, but the doctors have condemned me. I shall never return to France alive!”

“Paul!” Her eyes swept up to his: he was answered. She dropped them again immediately, and stood trembling, without another word.

The sounds of hoofs had been heard on the gravel of the courtyard; a carriage had drawn up under the portico; a hurried summons flashed along the electric wire.

“It is the doctor!” gasped Madame de Mersy. For one instant Paul hesitated; then he flung himself down on his knees, and, catching at the passive hand on the door lock, he covered it with kisses.

Through the folding doors of the adjacent boudoir, pushing aside the noiseless portières, somebody hurriedly forced an entrance—Madame de Praville stood in the middle of the room.

“In time!” she said. For a moment that was all. The man had sprung to his feet.

“Thank God!” added Madame de Praville; then, hurrying toward her sister-in-law, she began speaking very fast.

“Denise, you must take my carriage at once—at once, do you hear?—and hurry off

exactly as you are to the ball at the Austrian Embassy. Your toilet is"—she cast a hurried glance all over it—"fortunately satisfactory; it is lucky you happen to be wearing your diamonds; one need hardly ask you why"—her eyes swept across to the young officer—"come away with me instantly! I will explain in the carriage; we have not five minutes to waste. And you, sir, be instantly gone!"

"I can not leave the house to-night," replied Madame de Mersy calmly. "Simone is ill."

"Simone!" exclaimed Madame de Prville indignantly. "Is this the moment to worry about a little girl's ailment? You, at any rate, seem willing to forget her!" and suddenly, across her long pallor, Madame de Mersy flushed crimson. "You must come at once, do you understand? In half a dozen minutes my brother will be here. He was dining with me alone, as you know, at the last moment you had refused to accompany him——"

"Simone."

"Quite so. He confided to me his doubts of—luckily, he believed that last night's leave-taking in his presence had not been final—I know not if some false friend of Monsieur de Sorac has betrayed him—if one of the serv-

ants—what shall we expect in a houseful of servants—or if only his own instinct, that we have always called jealousy——”

“Madame,” said de Sorac, “you are a woman. You are free to insult both women and men.”

“You mistake me utterly, monsieur. But it is to you, Denise, that I address myself. Your husband’s suspicions were aroused——”

“Aroused!” exclaimed Denise bitterly.

“By your refusal to accompany him. ‘The child has a cold,’ he said, ‘but the cold is an excuse.’ I laughed at him for his senseless jealousy—have I not done so a hundred times in your presence, calling him Othello, warding off unpleasantnesses, making things supportable. Ah! I grant you he was insupportable—as long as I believed you were injured—I who a hundred times have wept with you!”

“You have seen me weep twice,” said Madame de Mersy. An oath broke through the clenched teeth of de Sorac.

“Swear at my brother to his face!” exclaimed the Marquise de Praville. “He will be delighted, monsieur, to make answer. But *you* come with me instantly, Denise. Oh, come instantly! Come, as you value happiness, your heart’s rest, your reputation, your home!” She ran forward and caught her

sister-in-law by the arm, but Madame de Mersy shook her off.

"My home," said Madame de Mersy, "is with the child. And with her I remain."

"Robert, when he finds you guilty, he will kill that man there, and you! Girl, have you not yet learned what is jealousy? *Command* your lover to go!"

"I am innocent!" cried, purple to the finger tips, Madame de Mersy.

"Innocent? What care I for your measure of innocence? Do you think that we want in our family a rehearsal of the society novel that never occurs? If Robert finds that man here we are lost!"

Madame de Mersy turned to her cousin. "Go, Paul," she said. "God bless you always and everywhere. Good-bye."

Madame de Praville beat her foot on the floor. "*Eh bien*, monsieur," she said, "you have your farewell."

The young man paused at the door. "Madame," he said slowly, "if I leave my cousin at this moment, unprotected, it is because I place her in your hands. You will defend her. She is pure as the angels in heaven."

"Your presence here," was the answer, "is the only danger that threatens Madame de Mersy."

Without further parley Paul held out his

hand to his cousin; she did not immediately take it, in the conflict of her thoughts.

"Bah, *ne vous gênez pas*," sneered Madame de Praille.

Then with proud deliberation, looking full into the young man's pleading eyes, Denise laid her hand in the one extended toward her and allowed it to rest there, while he slowly kissed it twice. The next moment she was alone with her sister-in-law.

"And I," burst out the other woman, "believed in you!"

"You may believe in me still," wearily responded Denise.

"What? Do you, a woman, dare to tell me, a woman, that you do not love the man who has just left this room?"

"All your words may be true, Edmonde, but your thought at this moment is a lie."

"A lie—a lie? And I, who have pitied you from the moment of your marriage!"

"You may pity me still."

The other stood back, and in scorn, in fury, in bitter sorrow, said, almost whispering:

"Marquise de Mersy."

"If you believed in me so utterly, why did you hasten here to-night to—warn me?"

"Utterly?—no. I believed in you as much as one woman ever believes in another. Denise, I have been here for nearly five min-

utes already. Robert was on foot; I ought to have, at the utmost, ten minutes' start. Will you come with me now, at once?—for the last time I ask it—saving everything a woman holds dear?”

“Everything? I hold one thing dear—the child.”

“Is that all? And your honour?”

“Why, pray, should my honour be touched if my husband finds me at home?”

“Because he will touch it—because—because—oh, mad woman, choose your choice! I must tell you, then. At least, now we are alone, it is possible to tell you. Monsieur de Sorac has a rival, or you have a friend—can you comprehend?”

“No.”

“Keep your own counsel. But Robert received in my drawing-room, to-night, a letter advising him to surprise you with Monsieur de Sorac.”

“Well? He will not surprise me with Monsieur de Sorac.”

“Your *sangfroid* is admirable; I could never have believed it. He will say that he came too early—it is for fear of this he now walks so slow—he will find you waiting, with your diamonds on!”

Madame de Mersy snatched with eager hands at the radiant splendour around her

neck and tore it away in a sprinkle of glittering shreds on the floor. Her sister-in-law screamed aloud.

"Take back your diamonds!" cried Madame de Mersy, her white chest panting, oppressed. "You—you are one of your race; like *him*, you think all women sell themselves for jewels and houses and titles and—God! I wish I could cast them back to you both as I trample on these chains which my parents——"

Madame de Praville, running forward, thrust her back.

"You are mad, indeed," gasped Madame de Praville; "these jewels are *ours*. Insult the memory of your parents, if you will; you shall not insult, madame, the name that you bear since six years—a name that was never sullied before. You shall come with me *now*. When that letter arrived, I, not knowing what to think, resolved to save your peace and my brother's; I laughed and I swore it was a palpable calumny, for this morning you had said in my presence you would be at the Austrian ball to-night! A note was brought me on the staircase; I seized on the opportunity—I went back to him—I said it was from you—that Simone was better—that you would join me at the embassy—he asked to see the letter—I refused, as if offended—I tore here

as fast as my horses could carry me—I have wasted six minutes—he is following—Denise, when he comes here, with that note in his pocket, he must not find you at home!” Madame de Praville stooped, and, with angry impatience, began gathering together the broken bits of the chain.

“I am innocent,” said Denise. “My life is a curse to me. Your brother has made it so. I must wait for the doctor. I must stay with the child.”

Madame de Praville raised herself from the ground. “See that you stay with the child,” she said meaningly. “The moment that Robert accepts his own accusations—already he has spoken of it—he does not leave you another day with the child.”

“*My child!*” cried Denise. “The law will protect me.”

“The law protects children against the women their fathers have divorced. Ah! you compel me to speak plainly. All is at stake. You are innocent, you say? It is possible. Is that why I discover your cousin kissing your hands, at your feet? The ladies of our house, madame, must learn another innocence than that. Either instantly you follow me—before yon second hand has travelled around again—or *I speak*—and Simone,

trust me, will be placed under other guardianship than yours."

For a moment the two women faced each other. Then, without another word, Madame de Mersy passed into the anteroom. Her cloak and fan lay ready. The groom of the chambers, watchfully impassive, took them from an ottoman. The maid crept downstairs.

"Does the child sleep, Valérie?"

"Not yet, Madame la Marquise."

"What? Why not? Has she coughed?"

"A little, Madame la Marquise. Her nurse is with her now. She is restless, not ill."

The mother, her cloak already about her neck, turned in the entrance hall.

"I must run up for one moment," she said.

"It is impossible!" exclaimed Madame de Praville in English. "If he sees my carriage here, all is lost"—and in French: "You would only disturb the child, my dear. She is probably just dropping off, is she not, Valérie?" Madame de Mersy hesitated; her sister-in-law caught her by the arm.

Valérie's eyes dropped before the swift command in Madame de Praville's.

"Oh! yes; she will soon be asleep. She is not ill," said Valérie.

"In an hour I shall be back," said Denise.

"If the doctor comes, he must wait. I can not understand about the doctor."

The groom of the chambers stepped forward. "There has just come a message from the doctor's, Madame la Marquise. He was not at home; they have sent for him."

Madame de Praille looked round, in the doorway, with her hand still on her sister-in-law's arm.

"I have not been here to-night, you understand, Josephine—and you, Valérie. It is half an hour since Madame la Marquise drove off to the Austrian Embassy. You must telephone instantly for the carriage to meet her there. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said the groom of the chambers.

"The other servants—they do not count," said Madame de Praille in English, as one footman stood waiting by the brougham. "He does not speak to them."

"You insult me—before these!" said Madame de Mersy.

Madame de Praille did not answer, the charge seemed to her so manifestly unfair. As the carriage rolled out of the courtyard on to the Cours de la Reine she gave a great gasp of relief. "The honour of our house," she muttered 'twixt her teeth, "to have hung on a hair!" Then in the sudden revulsion

of feelings she began heaping warnings, reproaches, threats, and entreaties on the young Marquise de Mersy.

The latter sat silent, with face averted, watching the lights flash by. She hardly heard the other lady's words; they did not touch her. She was thinking of the early home life in the quiet Touraine woods, of her fortunate marriage, her splendid existence—above all, Simone. And Paul had said that he was dying; he would never come back; she would never see Paul again.

"How so—you answer nothing?" cried Madame de Praville.

Denise turned her face. "It is no use; you do not understand me. Think all the evil of me, if you will. Perhaps you are right. But I—I have been faithful to Robert. Edmonde, he would rob me of my child."

"Promise me that you will receive no more visits!" entreated Madame de Praville.

Denise threw back her head, incapable of reply. The tears shot into her eyes and stood there.

The carriage, which had been creeping up the line, now stopped in the blaze of the entrance. Madame de Praville looked out. "The coast seems clear," she said. "I will go. Do you come ten minutes later. One can never be sure."

And, indeed, the first person Madame de Praville saw among the crowd on the staircase was her brother, standing expectant.

"You?" she said coolly. "I thought you were going home. Is Denise already here?"

"No," he answered gloomily. "What a time you have taken!"

"Very sure; I have spent ten long minutes in the 'file.' Robert, I have so often said things to you, I should like to say a thing to-night."

"Well?"

"Hush! I do not like Denise; I have never pretended to like her. Of that you are sufficiently aware."

"I am indeed."

"But in suspecting her, in accusing her, as *you* do, you wrong her absolutely—once for all I say it—I am not laughing to-night. A woman like Denise does not flirt with her cousins. It is no use reasoning with a jealous man—I know it—but I—I dare to tell you. Your thought is the thought of a fool. Take me to monseigneur."

She had struck at him boldly with the one word that, in a man of his character, strikes home. She knew it, and, despite her high mettle, she trembled as, with tightpressed lips, he offered her his arm.

A few moments later Denise de Mersy

entered the ball-room. Her face was set, and even her eyes were almost calm. Madame de Praville avoided looking in the direction of her brother. The marquis flushed with transitory contrition; he checked a sudden impulse to go up to his wife and be kind.

"*De la tenue!*" he said to himself. "Do not let us make fools of ourselves in public. Neither in public nor in private," he added. And he thought, with an ugly scowl, of his sister's ugly word. He was not the sort of man that makes a fool of himself on purpose. He went and talked to other women, as was his right, pleasantly, sometimes prettily, with compliments neatly turned, with flashes of the cynic wit that only hurts at home. Occasionally his furtive glance stole across in search of his wife. She was a beautiful woman; men thought her beautiful and gathered around her. It was fit she should be beautiful. She was almost too beautiful for comfort.

He lost sight of her; half an hour later he found her, in another room, with two young officers; they were talking and laughing. He drew her aside.

"Denise," he said, "you have actually forgotten to put on your necklace. It is like you to come to a great entertainment and neglect to finish dressing. Did you not notice that your neck is bare?"

"I was in a hurry," she said. "You remember I had dressed to go with you to your sister's. I was anxious to come early."

"Why?" A sudden suspicion leaped into his eye.

"I do not intend to stay long."

"Ah! Well, I think you had much better go back at once. Forgive my saying it, but the effect is absurd. I shall stay."

She did not inquire how long, so he carefully told her. "I shall not be in till quite late," he said.

She hardly heard him. "Home!" that was all she thought. "Would you get me my carriage?" she asked, endeavouring to check the eagerness in her voice. He bowed, watching her closely, all his suspicions again suddenly alight. A few moments later her horses were hurrying her homeward, the very cadence of their hoofs on the pavement repeating "Simone."

In the entry the groom of the chambers awaited her. The agitation of his manner sent the blood to her throat.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

"Ah! Madame la Marquise, we had sent to the embassy. Thank God! you are come. Another doctor is with her, the first we could summon. The poor little darling——" But

Madame de Mersy was already halfway up the stairs.

In the long corridor Valérie met her weeping. "I know," said Madame de Mersy, but she did not believe herself.

A strange physician was in the bedroom; a couple of women servants were helping him. Madame de Mersy went straight to the cot. "What is it?" she said. "What is the matter? The child is asleep."

No one answered her. She knelt down in a great rustle and glitter, and lightly touched her daughter's forehead. One of the servants moved, and a ray from the lamp crossed the pillow. With a shriek that filled the house the mother rose erect. The women burst out crying.

"Speak—you! What has happened?" said Madame de Mersy.

"A convulsion, Madame la Marquise. It must have come suddenly in the midst of her coughing. There can have been very little pain."

"The doctor! Our doctor! Forgive me, monsieur; I hardly know what I am saying. But see, you are a stranger! *Something* must be done, and that instantly. Valérie! Joseph! It can not be too late! Our own doctor! God! where is our good doctor Duseau?"

"Here, madame — calm yourself — I am here"—the house doctor came hurrying in. He examined the little body; he held whispered consultation with his colleague; Madame de Mersy stood watching. "It is the will of God," said the doctor tremulously. "Dear madame, had I been present, I could have done nothing more."

The mother sank to the ground. "Had I been here," she said, "she would not have died." And at this word she dropped her head on her hands and lay still.

The lady's maid broke into loud lamentation and self-reproach. It was some time before her mistress heard—still longer before she understood her. Simone, then, had been feverish, had been coughing badly, when her mother left the house, but Madame de Praille had signed to Valérie to keep silence. No one, of course, could have foreseen any serious complication. The healthiest child, as every one knows, may be suddenly struck dead by convulsions. The doctor nodded assent.

At last Madame de Mersy understood. She looked up. "God will forgive you," she said. "He forgives everything."

"Doctor, is it absolutely hopeless?"

"Ah, madame!"

"If you please, I would be alone."

But already Josephe was whispering at the door.

The child's nurse approached her mistress. "Monsieur le Marquis has come home." No one had ventured to tell him.

"Ah!" said Denise. Even at that moment she realized why he had hastened home, what he had expected to find. "I will go to him," she said.

She passed down into the great hall, her jewels flashing all about her, the famous Mersy tiara erect upon her brow.

He was in the little drawing-room, where Paul had knelt to her barely an hour ago. He was pacing the room in agitation; he turned as she entered, and at once:

"Your cousin de Sorac has been here," he said. He noticed her terrible pallor—the agony of her set features; a red mist of rage crossed his eyes.

"Yes," she said.

He stood staring at her, uncertain in his fury, his misery, what to do next.

"Simone is dead," she said.

He stood staring.

She went on speaking, automatically, as if it had been some one else. "She died quite

suddenly. In a convulsion. The doctor says that nothing can be done."

"Denise!" he cried, and stretched out both arms to her, all his ungovernable passion for her surging to his breast.

"No," she said.

MEESS.

THE story of Meess begins at Malvern. One can see her in the little dusk-red house semi-detached, with "apartments," sitting of evenings with her mother, the curate's widow, trying to make both ends meet. What if they did meet, on paper, prospectively? In reality something always went amiss. The two boys were growing up and had to be kept at the college; Milly was nearly eighteen and wanted smart frocks—Cicely had never wanted smart frocks; some lodger they had built their modest hopes on was sure to stop away. It is said that drowning people come up three times; those who go down in the social struggle never seem to get a change of air. If it is true that nothing succeeds like success, my God! nothing fails more persistently than failure.

When Cicely explained to her mother that she, Cicely, must go out as a nursery governess, and that Millicent must take her place at home, Mrs. Thyghe nodded tearful

acquiescence. Cicely had long dreaded and put off the painful moment. An unusually terrible butcher's bill helped her through.

"Yes, I suppose it is inevitable," replied Mrs. Thyghe.

"And the inevitable is never very difficult," said Cicely bravely.

"Why not, my dear?"

"Oh! that would be illogical, as papa would have said."

"Your poor papa! He understood every logic in the world, excepting that two and two don't make five."

And so Cicely, more logical than her father, came to Holland as nursery governess to the Van den Hills. There had naturally been a good deal of preliminary discussion and consideration, for to the eyes of middle class Malvern Holland seemed farther away than Tasmania.

"It sounds terribly foreign," said poor Mrs. Thyghe; "and the people all live in boats."

She gathered but little comfort from the information, vouchsafed by the doctor's wife, that many of them lived on poles. "Like St. Simon Skylights," said Millicent, who was ignorant, wore a fringe, and could not have gone out as a governess. After all, it seemed the best thing that Cicely should ac-

cept the place her former schoolmistress had found for her. Miss Budge wrote to say that, by all accounts, the Netherlands were the paradise of governesses; nowhere are they treated so entirely as members of the family. Cicely smiled sadly; it seemed so funny to think that she should be a member of the family Van den Hills.

But when she arrived, with the last tear dried upon her bonny cheeks, among the low, cow-filled meadows under early autumn mists, at the big old house asleep behind its beech trees; when she arrived, half sick from her journey, among the strangeness and foreignness and undesired picturesqueness of it all, she found kindly people waiting to receive her. The Van den Hills were wealthy; they lived, summer and winter, at their beautiful château in the country, away from everybody and everything; he nursing his artistic temperament on leisurely contemplation of the beautiful, she engrossed in her delicate health. There were two little girls of five and seven, yellow-haired tots, whom their father considered as possibilities of beautiful development, physical and psychical; while their mother looked upon them as a moral and religious responsibility.

"I trust you will help me," said Mevrouw Van den Hill, lying back among her

sofa cushions and trying not to look tired. "I trust you will help me, Miss Tigg, in belabouring the bodies and souls of my children."

Cicely blushed. "I am very young, madam," she murmured. "I trust *you* will help *me*. I shall try to do my best." She wondered whether Mevrouw Van den Hill would always call her "Tigg," and whether it would always be possible to understand the foreign lady's meaning. She seemed to hear her mother's voice: "Yes, ours is an unusual name. My poor, dear husband's father——" but the reader may be spared the rest. Cicely smiled.

"She is good looking," said Mynheer to his wife. "Very fair skinned and fair haired. Only eighteen, is she? A pretty, pleasant-looking girl."

"I showed you the photograph," answered Mevrouw; "she was not so pretty on the photograph."

Mynheer laughed. "All the better for her," he said. "You women are so jealous. Did you treat her to your stereotype phrase about 'belabouring the children'?"

"I told her I hoped she would share a responsibility which——"

"Yes, yes; I know. I know all you are going to say, dear. No, I can not 'belabour

the children.' Stick to your phrase; it is a good one."

"What do you mean?" she asked innocently.

He kissed her with affection, and laughed himself out of the room.

He was a good-natured, easy-going man, not yet forty, who took life easily (as he found it) and wished every one else to do so. It was one of his staple regrets that there were people in the world with less money, or with more, than he had. With more, because that prevented his buying beautiful objects others could pay higher prices for; with less, because he wanted all the children on this earth to get as much cake as they could eat. His children did not get so much cake as they could eat. But that was *Mevrouw Van den Hill's* doings. And *Mynheer* complained, chaffingly, to all who came near of his invalid wife's devotion and sense of duty—her strenuousness, in a word.

"She is like the flies," he used to say. "They lie on their backs and kick up a commotion." And then he would kiss her, lest she would think that he meant it. Which he partly did.

Mevrouw Van den Hill was one of those rare women whose pure touch can rest on pitch undefiled. She lived sinless, in a world

of sin, and deemed herself a sinner. Carefully brought up in a sheltered country house, married at twenty to a distant neighbour she had always liked; cultured, comfortably established, caressed; she joined in gay conversation and even read, without pleasure, an occasional naughty novel, yet all the time she never understood what evil was. Deeply religious herself, it was her earnest desire that all should share her happiness, but she never obtruded her sentiments or opinions on those who were neither anxious nor ready to hear them. In any case, the powers at her disposal were small; she had always been more or less an invalid, and, at the time of Cicely's arrival, her energy alone still kept her semi-erect.

The English girl had not been two days in the house before she discovered that she would be neither Miss Tigg nor Miss Tighe for the rest of her story there, but "Meess" once for all. It was Meess from morning till night. The children went calling her all over the place, eager to show her their treasures. After a time the treasures were shown, the strangeness and newness and picturesqueness had worn off. Nothing but the monotony remained.

It was surely the dullest house that ever a full-blooded man found himself compelled

to reside in. Old, dingy, draughty, deplorable in its internal arrangements, delightfully quaint with its turrets and wainscots, beautifully furnished, full of tapestry and carving; a bit of sixteenth-century history, pros and cons. In the summer it was bright with old Dutch floral devices that nobody ever saw but the weary owners, for the health of the mansion's mistress prohibited visits of any kind. As the autumn deepened the flowers went slowly dead in rainy silence; the white mists gathered about the rotting trees. Nobody ever rang at the gate, unless it was a beggar. Then various faces would appear at various windows, curiously gazing across the dripping court. Mynheer Van den Hill stood, his hands in his pockets, wishing he could wish for a chat with the beggars, whom the coachmen had orders never to admit but to send, more or less satisfied, away.

In that heavy silence of secluded life the only thing distinctly noticeable from day to day was the mother's fainting gasp up mountain slopes of duty, whose snowy summits mocked her from the clouds. Occasionally, when she fell and hurt herself, her nervous husband would stop and chide. Otherwise he was as full of devotion as she of care; together they bore the double weight of ill health and ineffective "treatments." To-

gether they endured the worry of a household they could neither reduce nor employ. Together they did all they could for the children, he laughingly, she with pedagogic intensity, both with a plenitude of isolated love.

"It is very quiet," wrote Cicely to her mother, putting things mildly, "but every one is so kind. Madam is an angel on earth, a human, delicate angel; the children are darlings; Mynheer is most amusing, clever, and courteous. I am surprised to find the queer, quaint little country so lovely. Every one looks contented and comfortable. The hills at the back of the house," etc. That is not the story.

The story is that, before Cicely had been many weeks in the house, the Dorsvelds came to stay in it. The Dorsvelds were a young married couple, cousins and intimate friends of the Van den Hills—in fact, they were the only guests that ever crossed the sunken threshold of "Braswyck." The Baron van Dorsveld, light and jolly, fond of all things rough and ready, was not the companion to seem most suited for this sensitive and cultured recluse of the castle, whom, however, he shook out of his melancholy broodings and triumphantly cheered up. But the beautiful, accomplished young baroness—an Arab yoked to a cob—was a fit associate for men

or for women, for demigods or—herself childless—for babes. She brought, immediately, light into the dark halls of the mansion; her sweet presence, the healthy tones of her voice, seemed to linger where she passed. Her pretty smile, like a sunbeam, fell across the heart of the poor young nursery governess, who wrote home enthusiastic accounts of the exquisite, soft-hearted creature. The guests only stayed two days, and disappeared. But the brightness of their visit faded slowly, like an afterglow.

The governess had settled down to her duty. It was not an arduous one. The little girls were too small to need much teaching; they liked her, and of course she liked them; was that not the interest and the pleasure of her life? She felt an affectionate regard for their struggling, resolute mother, and she admired the resignation and all-pervading “artisticity” of Mynheer. She also admired his caustic wit, which judged all creation from a vantage point. “She laughs in the right places,” said Mevrouw.

“Does anybody laugh in this house?” asked Mynheer, who was in a desponding mood. “I haven’t heard any one laugh since Dora Dorsveld left.”

So the weeks went on and seemed to stand still, and yet noiselessly brought the great

change nearer. For, one morning, the governess, coming in to inquire whether the children should wear their thingummies or their whatdyecallemes, found Mevrouw in a dead faint on the floor. She had never seen other illness than the boys' bad colds and her mother's megrims (which she had always most patiently tended); she ran out, much startled, and ran up against Mynheer, who certainly loitered too much in the hall among his bric-à-brac. He was as terrified and as useless as she; the lady's maid, quick, collected, accustomed, put them aside and brought her mistress to.

"It is nothing! The room was too hot," said Mevrouw Van den Hill.

But his smouldering fears had leaped up into a flame. From the maid he extracted a confession that her mistress was often like this; that often the faithful wife and mother had fainted as the door closed on the husband and children she had smiled on to the last; that sometimes even, if Mynheer had suddenly returned for one more question, she had risen again by sheer force of affection to give him a reply. Mynheer kissed his wife very solemnly that night, and asked permission to send for a great doctor all the way from Berlin. They were rich, and he thought they could afford it. However rich you are, you

can never be sure with the great doctors of to-day.

They had gone through many lesser consultations and subsequent treatments—all failures. They knew that no commotion on earth, no battle or tempest strikes such lasting desolation into an affectionate home as a modern specialist's visit. In a few deliberate sentences the physician tells you what must be done—it is always the impossible—and you see him depart to the station, a kid-gloved blizzard.

Professor von Schrump said Mevrouw Van den Hill must come to his "klinik" in Berlin. She had better come at once. She must come alone. She must hold no communication of any kind with her relatives while there. Yes, they might write—if they died.

So, after much weighing and weeping, Mevrouw went. She could speak no German. Everybody was kind to her, and she thanked them.

And the lonely little nursery governess at the château discovered how the sick mistress on her sofa had been the prop and guide of the whole household. Yet, in the desolated home, everybody rose to the occasion. The servants, left pretty much to themselves, accepted the responsibility; the little girls were good; the master, white and still, in an agony

of straining doubt and anxiety, consulted with Cicely about the children's winter clothing, and, once a week, examined their copybooks, their little pitiful sums. The English girl, utterly forlorn, alone in the schoolroom evening after evening, with the howl of the wind and the latest news from far away Malvern, never let Mynheer Van den Hill see her red eyes, and one day, of deliberate resolve, stopped crying altogether.

The professor, after a month's silence, sent a letter, written by some amanuensis, to say that he had received all remittances and Mynheer must double them, for Mevrouw required a second room. Mynheer told "Meess" about this and about other matters; they fell into occasional talks about Mevrouw or about Cicely's little circle in her own country, kindly, courteous gossip with inevitably increasing interest in each other's affairs and in each other. And gradually there deepened upon her innocent heart a great liking for the quiet, gentle-souled man with the pale-blue eyes and sorrowful haughty face, who said such caustic things and did such kind ones. All the more was this the case after one December evening, when she had crept down, quite against her custom, before her own late supper, crept down along the silent passages to ask him something about

the children's holidays. She had knocked at the library door, which stood ajar, and, believing him to have answered, she entered. He was standing in evening dress by the great window, from which he had thrown back the curtains; a wild wind was beating the rain against the panes.

"My God!" he gasped, staring out into the darkness. And then she understood his first utterance to have been a groan.

She crept away, trembling, to weep over her untasted meal in her room.

Next morning he came in to the children's breakfast, laughing, full of a sleighing party he had organized for them all.

"I have written," he said, "to the Baron and Baroness van Dorsveld, asking them to come here for Christmas. If she consents we must have some sort of festivities; in any case, I should like to give the servants their usual Christmas tree. But I can not do it unless the Baroness Dorsveld consents to play hostess and help me. There are a couple of hundred parcels and presents to get ready: I can't do all that."

"Perhaps I could help," suggested Cicely timidly. "At home I used to help with the Sunday-school Treat."

"By all means," he said heartily; "that would be delightful. But I shall not begin

the whole thing unless Mevrouw Dorsveld comes."

"We can help, papa," said the children.

"Even in that case, I dare say we should get ready," he answered, laughing again. "But first I must have Mevrouw Dorsveld's answer."

The latter lady showed the letter to her husband. "It will be an awful bore," he said. She did not answer.

"Don't you think it would be a bore?"

"I hardly know. Braswyck will certainly not be amusing. But then, you see, I am very fond of Lorence Van den Hill. *He* amuses me." She looked down at the open letter in her hand.

"I can see nothing funny in him," replied her husband.

"Well, no; I suppose not. His is still champagne."

"I like still champagne," said the baron.

"Well, then, I don't know. To me Lorence is exceedingly exhilarating, and you find him dull. He is passing through a terrible experience. I think, Fritz, we had better go."

"Very well; don't expect me to stay there all the time, though. How ever you can find him amusing! Why, he never has a real jolly, noisy, roaring laugh."

She shuddered slightly. "Do you mean,"

she said, "that you will leave me there and— and go to The Hague?"

His eyes met hers. "I—I don't know about The Hague," he answered; "but I shouldn't stay at Braswyck."

"Oh! by all means go to The Hague," she said, and swept from the room.

He bent over his finger tips, studying the nails. "Did she expect to marry a Puritan?" he reflected. And, after a considerable pause: "No, she is by no means a fool. She can not have expected to marry a Puritan."

She had not. They went out a great deal for the next week or so, and were very merry. Then, some ten days before Christmas, they journeyed away into the snow and the black gauntness of the forests and the gray depths of lowering sky.

"It is very good of you to come," said Lorence Van den Hill, meeting them at the great hall door.

"Well, yes it is," replied Dorsveld, stamping the snow from his boots.

"In fact, I meant your wife. Of course you go where she goes."

"Why, pray?" Van Dorsveld stared.

"Because you are a lucky man to have so charming a companion."

"H'm. The girls have grown. Good-evening, Meess."

The beautiful baroness turned. "Ah, you are there?" she said. "Good-evening, Meess. It is you will have to show us our rooms."

"No; allow me, pray," said Van den Hill, interposing. The governess drew back alarmed. The master of the house intended to remain the master. He performed his duties during the following days with accentuated accuracy.

"We are more comfortable," said the baroness to her husband, "than in his dear wife's time."

"That is true," replied Fritz; "yet I am going off to-morrow, the house is too terribly dull. You won't mind, will you? I suppose it's all proper. There are the governess and the children."

"Don't go," she said suddenly.

"Oh! but I must. What nonsense? Why?"

"Don't go, Fritz." Her voice was so unexpectedly earnest, he stopped untying his tie.

"Of course I'll stay if you want me to," he answered fretfully, "but it's awfully hard on me; I've been here two days. I warned you beforehand. And you surely don't want me; you get on capitally with Lorence. You can sing duets with him all the evening, as

you did to-night; it's awfully slow for a fellow. La—i! La—boom! for hours."

She stood fingering her bracelets. "I thought you liked our singing," she said. "You said it was very good. Why," she turned on him angrily, "you said we reminded you of Patti and Reszké in the bedroom scene of *Romeo and Juliet*!"

"Well, a chap doesn't want to make himself disagreeable——"

She barely heeded him. Taking a few steps into the far dusk of the gaunt chamber, she sang:

*"Non, non, ce n'est pas, ce n'est pas l'alouette ;
C'est le doux rossignol, compagnon de l'amour."*

She came back to him. "Why, I should never have sung it," she said, "but for your pleasure. Why should I sing it? Don't go, Fritz!"

"Oh, come! that's hard on a fellow. And me that never pretended really to care for music!"

"True. Lorence loves it and never gets it. His wife doesn't sing or play."

"His wife's ill. What's the use of a wife that's always ill?"

"Ah! What would you do, had you a wife that was always ill?"

"Take another that wasn't, and nobody,

surely, could object. I wonder if he makes love to the little governess? She's very pretty."

"I have not noticed," replied the baroness, her sweet voice gone disagreeable. And then, as he rudely laughed: "What foolishness," she said. "The Meess! Lorence Van den Hill is not the sort of man to make love to a Meess."

"When is his wife coming back?"

"No one knows. The doctor writes nothing."

Van Dorsveld whistled. "She had better look out," he said. His manner exasperated her, but, checking her annoyance:

"Fritz," she repeated, "don't go and leave me alone in this place."

"Well, I won't," he answered grumblingly. And she kissed him, flinging both arms around his neck. But two days later—and certainly the days passed very slowly—he came to her, as she sat cheerfully busy with the others, among the piles of Christmas things.

"I have a letter," he said, and he held it in his hand, "about important business. I fear I really must leave to-night."

"Oh!" she answered, looking down at the guilt trifle she was making for the tree. "Is it The Hague?"

"Yes."

"How long will you be away?"

"Some ten days, I fear. Over Christmas, of course, and perhaps even over New Year's Day. It's a very great——"

She interrupted him, with a swift shock as their eyes met.

"So long?" she said. "Why not make it Paris?" and then she began talking very fast to "Meess."

"There's still such a great deal to do," she declared. "Why, Christmas is only two days hence. We shall all be very busy."

"The house is quite bright and jolly," said Lorence—Fritz pulled a face, as he turned away—"and since you came, Dora, everybody seems to know exactly what to do. None of us did before."

"Oh, papa! Meess always does!" cried the elder girl in a flush.

An awkward pause ensued. "I was judging by myself," said the father humbly, and Cicely cast him a grateful smile.

"My dear Lorence," Fritz paused on his way out, "look after my wife!" He laughed heartily over this joke.

"I shall ask one of my cousins Weylert to join me here," said the baroness quietly. "You might have given me fairer warning, Fritz; you had plenty of time."

"I only heard this morning."

"Yes, yes; I was thinking of the night before last. Well, I shall telegraph for Mary Weylert."

But at that time of the year neither Mary Weylert could come, nor her sister, nor any one else. So Christmas found the little company at Braswyck still curiously incomplete, but too busy to care about considerations. The great tree was lighted up in the wainscoted hall, and the gaping retainers (they gaped yearly) gathered round the piles of laboriously assorted presents. One of them in taking leave started a sentiment about Mevrouw's return, and all who came after him mechanically put down a heavy foot on the same sore spot.

"Thank you," said the master; "thank you." But he thanked Cicely in very different tones for the care of his motherless children. She trembled so she could make no answer; nor dared she venture to offer him openly the card she had carefully illuminated with words of hope and trust. Not in the baroness's presence; that lady, though secretly condescending still, seemed to dampen the schoolroom's enjoyment of the festival. The little, soft-hearted governess humbly placed her card on Mynheer's writing table, where the baroness happened to see it when she ran

in to inscribe a brief response to her husband's telegraphic "Merry Christmas!"

On the evening of that holy eve, as all were going to their rooms worn out, the Baroness van Dorsveld, stopping on the landing, addressed herself suavely to the governess.

"It has been enjoyable," she said, "but tiring. The circumstances, of course, are sad."

"Yes; oh! I do hope madam will soon come back," replied Cicely.

The lady cast a keen glance at her.

"Of course," said the baroness; "of course, who would not? You find it lonely?"

"Lonely it certainly is. But I was thinking of poor madam. And of Mynheer. I so deeply pity Mynheer."

"Ah! Take care, Meess, that you do not too deeply pity Mynheer."

There was so much scornful meaning in the words that the poor little nursery governess caught fire.

"Pray, what does your ladyship mean, may I ask?" she said quickly.

"Fie! what an unwise question. I have surprised your secret, little Meess. I am wise—and also I am good. I mean only kindness. There are feelings akin to pity, so close that they meet. And often it is dangerous to feel

them. Often, also, it is quite, quite useless. I do not know which is worse. But in the latter case one feels so sorry, and one calls out 'stop.' It is silly, but one does it. Even a wise person, like me, especially when the wise person is good. Sleep well, Meess! We are all worn out. Good-night."

She went into her room and closed the door, leaving Cicely hot and cold in the passage—hot with thoughts of herself and of home; cold with dislike of the woman who had seemed so sweet. But a moment later the girl told herself she was unjust. The baroness had acted rightly, and presumably in kindness. There is nothing more acutely painful to a woman than to find a secret surprised which she had been spending her heart's blood to preserve. Cicely cried herself to sleep like a child.

But next morning and the ensuing mornings she was very calm and civil.

"She behaves admirably," reasoned the young baroness. "She is only a nursery governess, after all. The undue prominence in the household is the fault of the mistress who ran away." The baroness was very hard on her dearest friend. Always in perfect health herself, "I can not understand these sort of ailments," she said. "You need not talk to me about them, Lorence. Of course I am full of

commiseration, but I simply don't understand."

She was much put out by the repeated refusals of female relations to come and keep her company at Braswyck. "My position here is absurd," she said. "I shall leave tomorrow."

"Good Heavens, no! You won't desert me on New Year's Eve," cried Lorence Van den Hill.

"I shall unless Fritz comes back," she replied, and deliberately went off for a walk with the governess.

The governess herself was greatly flurried, for that morning she had received a private missive, personally handed to her with much display of secresy by the postman—a letter from Mevrouw Van den Hill. "I am coming back," so wrote Mevrouw, "the day after tomorrow. I want my return to be a complete surprise to my husband and children. I shall take a conveyance from the station. I am very much better. The operation has removed the cause of my prostration. All I now need, the professor says, is absolute repose. Well, I can have that at Braswyck. Mind you keep my secret. On no account breathe a word to any one. I want to see the effect of my sudden return on the poor, lonely husband at home."

The governess might listen to the baroness's practised conversation, only one thought was thumping at her brain—how could she get *Mevrouw Dorsveld* away before to-morrow night without betraying her charge? She was only a nursery governess, and the dress of the lady walking next to her must have cost some four hundred francs!

"You were speaking of a lady coming here to-day," she at last ventured timidly. "The lady is not coming?"

"No," replied the other coolly; "shall we go up the dyke?"

"You will not find the dyke too windy?"

"True, let us turn down here." The baroness called the dogs. "Well, as I was saying, my grandmother used to——"

"Then I think you told me you intended to leave?" Cicely trembled with agitation.

The baroness stared at her, amazed. "Used to have the fires lighted on the first of November," continued the baroness after a moment's pause, "whatever the temperature might happen to be."

"How strange!" said the wretched Cicely. "Your ladyship must not be angry with me, please; but I was only thinking that—oh! I don't know how to say it!" She actually wrung her hands.

"Then don't!" exclaimed the baroness quickly. "Never say what you don't know how to say."

"But so much is at stake—I feel that it is perhaps my duty——"

"Your duty!" the baroness blazed around at her; "your duty, Meess, is to go back and give the children their lessons. Good-day." And Dora Dorsveld turned off, white with fury, walking fast, she knew not whither, leaving the governess *planté-là*.

When they met at lunch of course things were slightly awkward.

"In this house only the impossible happens," said Dora to Van den Hill. "You have noticed, of course, that your little governess is in love with you——"

"I; my dear Dora——"

"And it makes her exceedingly impatient."

"You are pleased to joke. Meess has never by word or sign——"

"Really? Well, we are uncomfortable. I have telegraphed to Fritz——"

"What?" He started from his chair.

"Unless you return at once, I go home to-morrow."

He stopped, thunderstruck. "Perhaps you are right," he said, after a long pause. "There will be no more singing, then?"

"To-night, as a finale, we can sing all the favourites. It is better I should go."

"Perhaps. I have so greatly enjoyed our—I—but this about the governess is absurd!"

"It is. And true. Shall we agree not to mention the ridiculous governess again?"

"So be it. But she is a good, harmless little creature, who has done her duty bravely all this time."

"Tell her. She will indeed be happy in your praise." He walked out of the room, and Dora remained sitting with her round chin on her shapely palm.

"Oh, that I had telegraphed yesterday!" she reflected, with burning cheeks. "Oh, that the parting was over, and I far away! Fritz, Fritz, surely every husband gets the wife that he deserves!" A moment later she passionately shook her head, "Not Lorraine!" she said.

In Cicely's terrified existence the short day wore slowly to dark. She sat, humbled with fear and wretchedness, in the school-room, trying to amuse her pupils, while her ears were straining to hear, not the voices of the singers in the great salon, but the sound of approaching wheels. There would come a moment when she would hear both. She felt it was not right that the wife, returning, should find this familiar guest established thus

in her place. Yet, also, she knew that she was powerless to prevent anything. And repeatedly she told herself that all her ideas and fears were absurd. What did she know of this foreign world and its proprieties? What of any great world? The happiness of these rich people was safe in their own hands. She was the nursery governess—a jealous fool.

“Let us have candles!” said Dora at the piano in the great salon.

“No, no; why should we have candles?”—he bent over her—“you know all the words by heart, and so do I.”

“Yes; but——”

“We have learned them all by heart, Dora—by heart.”

In the long silence and the darkness there was little singing.

“Let us go up and dress for dinner,” she said. “I wonder whether Fritz will come to-night?”

“We can do without him. You are not angry with me for saying that? It has been a happy time for me. You—you have made it bearable—you have done a great deal more—you have—I could not have endured my misery without you. Instead of that, you have—you have——” He bent down and kissed her. A faint light was spreading toward them through the opening of the dis-

tant door. He ran forward. "Elizabeth!" he cried, and fell back; then, rushing forward, drew his wife away into the hall.

"My God! what does this mean?" he gasped.

"I have come back," she answered in a dull voice. "Lorence, who was with you in there?"

He flung himself before the door.

"The Meess," he said.

"The Meess!" she exclaimed, between scorn and amazement, and allowed him to lead her into her own little sitting-room.

"I had wished to surprise you," she said, sinking down on a sofa.

"That sort of thing is always a failure," he answered irritably. "Well, never mind. And you are really better? It has been so strange—the separation!"

"Never mind?" she repeated vaguely, and sank back among the cushions. She did not answer when he spoke. Striking a match, he saw her lying in her travelling things, white and still. He hurried out and sent her, her maid.

His next few moments were feverishly occupied. For he had to explain many things to Dora and to Cicely! His hurried consultation with the former was interrupted by a loud clang at the door bell and the arrival

of Fritz. The baron's train, coming from the opposite direction, had deposited him at the little rural station a few minutes after Mevrouw Van den Hill's departure thence.

"Well, what on earth is the matter?" demanded Baron Fritz, walking into the now fully lighted drawing-room. "Lorence, I hear that your wife has come back; she had taken the single decent conveyance. Now, what on earth can you want with me?"

"I wanted you," said his wife quietly.

"Humph!"

"And I leave you together," interposed Van den Hill, and ran up to the governess in the schoolroom. In ten words, hastily, ashamed, like a man and a coward, he told her what he hoped of her. The whole happiness of his home was at stake. And to her what would it matter? "You can not have been happy here," he gasped, "in this miserable, gloomy hole! Anywhere else you will be happier. We will do all we possibly can for you. Any pecuniary compensation I can——"

"Silence!" she said steadying herself against the schoolroom table. "You have no right to ask this of me, Mynheer Van den Hill."

"Right?" he repeated. "No, indeed; I am wronging you cruelly. But what am I

to do! I am desperate! A married woman! Her friend! My wife can never forgive me. And yet, I assure you, like all very good women, she grossly exaggerates. I have told her——”

“She would not mind the governess,” said Cicely bitterly.

“Not so; you know her too well for that. But it is different. I do not wish her ever to know that *Mevrouw van Dorsveld* has stayed here all alone. By a merciful dispensation the baron has returned.”

“Returned?” cried Cicely.

“Yes; you see how even Providence interposes on our behalf. No great wrong has been done, I swear it! Providence will not permit the ruin of this home for so little! Think of *Mevrouw* in her weak health—of her goodness. Think of the poor little girls. I do not ask you to consider all I have suffered. I ask nothing but that you do not contradict me! Nothing but that.”

Cicely sank her face on one hand. “I won’t contradict you,” she said. “Please go away.”

He held out his hand, but she could not see it. He hesitated a moment. “God reward you,” he said thickly, and crept from the room.

An hour later Cicely was sent for.

She found Mevrouw Van den Hill alone in the boudoir.

"This is a strange home coming, Meess," began Mevrouw, in a constrained but sorrowful voice. "Very different from what I had expected. But we will not discuss that. I can make all possible allowances. I am not angry, only very, very sorry. I think—do not you?—it would be best that we do not protract our parting, as part we must. They are getting ready a carriage to take you to the town, where you can be accommodated at the Governess's Home. I—I will do all I can for you. Mynheer Van den Hill does not deny that he has been most to blame. I—I am very sorry."

"Mevrouw," faltered Cicely, "I—I—do not, please, be unhappy. I hope and trust you are much better, and will now—will—" She broke down. "Believe me," she said passionately, "there has been no great wrong done. Neither by me, nor——" She stopped.

Mevrouw motioned her away. "I *am* willing to believe it," said Mevrouw, "most willing, God knows. Too willing! indeed, I am most thankful to hear you say it. There has been no great wrong done."

"No great wrong done," said Cicely.

ANNETTE DE VIROFLAY.

ANNETTE DE VIROFLAY married her cousin René of the same name.

They were both orphans; the education of both had been pretty well neglected. Both were dependent, in every sense of the word, on their grumpy, stingy, harmless old grandfather; and although René had been at a boarding school and Annette in a convent all through the greater part of their childhood, yet they must have seen a good deal of each other during the holidays in the dull old house which the dull old gentleman inhabited close to Nancy. Nobody ever knew much about them or what they did, but everybody knows that, when she was nineteen and he was twenty-one, their grandfather wrote to each of them and told them to come home and live with him. Whereupon they both started, he from a provincial university where he was studying law, and she from her Paris convent school, both arriving on the same October night, in wind and rain, at their grandsire's door, within a few hours of each other.

The old gentleman received them very graciously, and settled between them, grumping and chuckling in turns. They, realizing a certain grown-upness, were awkward in his presence, and still more awkward when alone. The only near relations they had, a couple of venerable aunts, grandpapa's sisters, cried out against the arrangement, inexpressibly shocked. But their cries did not reach grandpapa, who had told them fifty years ago that he intended all his life long to shock them. "I shall consider it my highest duty to shock you," had said grandpapa; and, really, the recording angel, though he may not have approved of the means which grandpapa employed, can hardly have disapproved of the end he had in view.

"I do not care a brass farthing," said grandpapa, "what anybody thinks about me or anybody else. All my life long I have made it a rule to do exactly as I chose, or, if you prefer, exactly as I thought right. It is the same thing; the expression depends upon whether you are a hypocrite or not. I have found my system answers very well. It requires a good digestion, freedom from sensitiveness, and an independent income."

"My dear children," said grandpapa, shifting a little skull cap he wore, "I have sent for you that you might cheer my old age. I

have done a great deal for you, and now my turn has come. René will look after things and read me the newspapers. Annette will also look after things—other things—and warm my slippers. We shall be a very happy family.”

Both young people looked submissive.

“My health is very good,” said grandpapa, “but I am beginning to feel my age, and I am lonely. The servant who did everything for me is dead, as you know, and the young man whom I now have is a fool. He can not even brush my clothes, René.”

“Do you expect me, sir, to brush your clothes?” said René.

“Well?” replied the old man, closely watching his grandson with his ferrety eyes. Annette made a quick sign to her cousin behind grandpapa’s back.

“I shall be very glad to do it,” said René.

“Right!” exclaimed the old man, hugely pleased. “I should have turned you out of the house to-night, young man, if you’d given me any airs! But I don’t expect you to brush my clothes—I only expect you to scold that idiot if he doesn’t. I can’t scold any more; I’m too old. Ah, me, how I could scold!” He sighed. “Sometimes I have thought it was my scolding killed Pierre. But I don’t believe it. It was indigestion did it. Plums.”

"We will do all we can to make you comfortable," said Annette.

"My dear, your intentions are laudable. A woman can't do much to make a man comfortable, but I've no doubt you mean well." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "Now, I remember, you don't like smoke?"

"Henceforth I like it," replied Annette, bravely winking her eyes.

"Admirable! admirable!" said grandpa. "It's too good to last, but it's an excellent start."

However, it lasted. For several months the two grandchildren devotedly tended the sickly old man. The cousins got on very well together, by looking at the funny side, and this attitude also enabled them to endure what was really in many ways a very trying time. Both of them had plenty of humour in their composition; their bright young faces were always ready for a laugh. Grandpa, whose temper was often as short as his breath, used to say they giggled, but that was distinctly untrue. And they even spoke kindly of grandpa behind his grumpy old back.

One fresh spring morning the master of the house did not come down to breakfast. The stupid boy, who was still stupid in spite of René's bright scoldings, reported that, having banged at the door and received no an-

swer, he had concluded monsieur to be still asleep. René went upstairs and discovered that no banging at the door would ever again disturb the sleep of Grandpapa Viroflay.

So these two children cried and sent for the doctor. The doctor having been and having informed them that "the deceased had died from failure of the heart's action," they cried still more and sent for the notary. The notary produced a will dividing all the dead man's estate, in two equal shares, between his grandchildren, with a pretty little codicil at the end about their care of him. The notary told them he thought there must be about a million francs, and the children cried yet more. One of them went to stay with the doctor's wife, and the other with the notary till after the funeral was over.

At the conclusion of that uninteresting ceremony the heir and the heiress remained behind in the uninhabited house. Having seen the last guest depart, they looked at each other awkwardly and blushed. The notary had asked René what they intended to do, and René had replied that really he did not know. René had inquired of the notary where the money was, and the notary had told René that really he didn't know either.

"I have the keys," said René, who had taken them out of the dead man's pocket.

He shuddered slightly at the thought of the dead man's garments now. "Supposing we go upstairs and look?"

"I would rather begin down here," replied Annette, with a little shudder too. So with hushed footfall and hushed voices they began wandering from cupboard to cupboard. But they knew the contents of these. Those contents were quite uninteresting.

"Come, nonsense! he isn't there," said René, with the roughness of agitation, and pushed into grandpapa's room and up to the cupboard which grandpapa always kept locked. He turned the key twice—a strong lock it was—and drew the door open. A pile of papers fell forward, almost upsetting him. A couple of others came toppling and slipping amid an avalanche of scrip and bond of all sorts. Annette and René sat down suddenly on the floor.

The April sun poured through the muslin-curtained windows into the dusty room. On the floor, in the golden light, sat the two Viroflays, neither of whom had ever owned more than a hundred francs at a time, amid a deluge of nineteenth-century gold.

"All that paper—is it money?" whispered Annette.

"I believe so," said René.

"Nobody ever spends as much as that," said Annette.

"Nobody ever could," said René.

And he dabbled among a little lake of crimson-coloured papers, letting the silken tissue crackle between his fingers; she watched him with much interest. All the colours of the rainbow were around them: blue and green and purple, yellow and violet and gold. They had no idea what the difference was or what the value, but soon both of them noted the ciphers—500 francs—1,000 francs—of the nominal emission, and suddenly those ciphers brought home to both the fact that they were rich.

"Half of it all belongs to you and half belongs to me," said René.

"It would never be possible to separate our shares," replied Annette.

"Nothing would be easier," said René, with increasing confidence. A long silence ensued.

"But why should we do so?" said René.

"Why, indeed? You can keep it for us both," answered Annette.

"I? I could never do that. I should never sleep a night. But we can give it to the notary to keep, and spend as much of it as we want together."

"Oh! I should not want much of it to spend!"

"Spend as much of it as we want together, Annette." His voice was very low, and it shook. They looked into each other's faces. He, drawing his hand from among the papers with a crackle seized hers. And so they were engaged.

"It is very wrong," said Annette, half crying; "in poor, dear grandpapa's room."

"It will save a lot of trouble and expense with the notary," replied René, "and grandpapa would have been sure to have liked that."

They got married as soon as they decently could, and they went to live in grandpapa's house. The notary, who saw they were very inexperienced, let them have as little money as they needed. So they lived on for more than a year in perfect happiness, and they had a little René. Grandpapa's sisters (who were very well off) even came to see them and showed no malice. They took warmly to little René (they maintained he was like grandpapa), and they declared to Annette that they liked her, but they told René, to her extreme indignation, that they thought *him* a bit of a fool. It would be untrue to affirm that Annette shared the old ladies' opinion, but certainly she need not have shown herself

so excessively offended, if the charge had been altogether as outrageous as she averred.

When Hector de Viroflay went to see them he said they were turtle-doves. But Hector de Viroflay is no judge, for with him all that sort of thing is mock-turtle. He is a distant cousin, by the by, of the young couple; he had been at school with René.

"Perfectly idyllic," said Hector, smoking a cigarette, "and so cheap! you are a lucky man, René."

"I am," replied René.

"Though why you should make it so cheap goodness only knows! Some men like saving money. Your grandfather did."

"I don't," said René. "I hate saving money, putting it by. Money is made round that it may roll, I always say. I spend whatever the notary gives me."

Hector sat up and opened his big eyes.

"Oh, delightful!" he exclaimed; "and then you ask for more!"

"No, no," replied René uncomfortably; "he would not like me to do that."

"Would not like? But the money is yours. What on earth do you mean about not saving money? Your grandfather left about a million. You can't spend more than a third of your income here!"

"I don't know. I don't know anything

about money, except that I like spending it. What do you think I ought to do?"

"Take your money away from the notary at once," replied Hector, with great decision. "People who leave their money with lawyers always, sooner or later, awake to find themselves penniless."

"Now you say it, of course that is true," admitted René, keeping down his agitation, "though I could never believe it of our notary——"

"People never believe it of their notary," put in Hector.

"But I grant you it is so. However, I can not go and take it away from him to-night."

"No, but you can to-morrow morning."

René turned hot and cold at the idea. He blushed and paled a good deal more, all the same, in the notary's office next afternoon. It was a very uncomfortable interview, he thought. The suave and practical man of business (whose conscience was clear in spite of his suavity) expressed a satisfaction he could impossibly feel. "It is right that you should manage your own affairs, Monsieur de Viroflay," he said. "If ever you should get tired of money matters, let me look after yours sooner than a stranger; good-bye."

Red and embarrassed, but triumphant,

René emerged into the street, where Hector was waiting for him. "Honestly," he said, "and to tell you the truth, Hector, I often quite longed for a sight of those exquisitely printed coloured things."

"Of course," replied Hector; "I can't think why you didn't ask for them sooner."

"Oh! Annette always said they were just as well at the notary's."

"What does a woman know of money matters?" exclaimed Hector.

"What, indeed?" cried René.

"What, indeed?" said Annette, when they propounded her this conundrum. She thought the papers might just as well have been left at the lawyer's; now they would have to buy an iron safe for them, and that was an unnecessary expense. Hector immediately pointed out to her that the lawyer's percentage came much more expensive, and she said humbly, after slow thought, that was true. She knew nothing, as they said, about finance.

But she hailed with the same exultation as René the suggestion by Hector that they should leave this dull town and establish themselves in Paris. They were young, they were good looking, of good blood and good fortune—in fact, it was absurd that they should stick on down here. When they came to think of it, it was; Annette felt ashamed,

even to herself, of some sneaking regrets for her pigeons, a particular corner in the garden (caterpillars), the pussies (they grow into cats), even the pigs. This anti-climax convinced her of her own foolishness. They would have plenty of acquaintances in Paris, and Hector would introduce René wheresoever he desired—Hector knew everybody; half a dozen years ago he had made his *début* in society with that unfortunate affair about Diane de Bragade.

To all parties the first weeks in Paris were highly enjoyable. The little family had taken a house of their own at Paris in the Avenue Martin, so as to be near the Bois for baby. Annette took baby and his Nounou to see Guignol in the Champs-Élysées, and, with the little fellow's yells of delight in her ears, she told herself what fools they had been to remain in the country. She herself enjoyed Paris with all a Frenchwoman's graceful capacity for innocent enjoyment, and, being a Frenchwoman—moreover, a Frenchwoman of birth and wealth—she easily assumed the position she was expected to fill. Hector piloted René into two good clubs, the Mirlitons and the Moutards ("singularly appropriate" murmured Hector), and into men's society generally. And soon both of them went wherever they chose. They chose a good

deal. The aunts wrote to Annette and sent her some introductions to very old people of the Faubourg. Annette went there also, alone. It was there my mother met her, and liked her. No more need be said.

So the weeks of life ran on, brightly painted, highly varnished, with gutta-percha tires. There had been a great deal of amusement about the iron safe, which they had all gone to purchase together, including baby. René had insisted upon baby being sat down in it first as their greatest treasure of all. Naturally baby had yelled, and the salesman, a bald gentleman whose entire exceedingly respectable existence was concentrated on burglars, had smiled with a pity akin to love.

They had nicknamed the safe *la tante*, for no reason whatever, excepting that Hector possessed a rich old aunt of whose stinginess he was always complaining. "*Our* aunt is more good natured," they said, and they would gladly have made her Hector's aunt also, but this he declined. He was quite willing to use all their comforts, to eat their dinners, to drive in their carriages, to win a few napoleons from René at some card game, but he refused to take their money.

"My aunt must unlock some day," he said. "She won't be able to help it."

So they enjoyed Paris and had a very good

time of it, but gradually Hector began to find that René played more than was good for him. "What a fool he is," thought Hector, who despised though he rather liked him. "He doesn't know how to choose his recreations sensibly, that's clear." For René had resolutely turned his back on some diversions that had been proposed to him.

"I won't go to anything," he had said, "which prevents my looking my wife straight in the face when I get home."

Annette, also, when the first excitement was over, began to suspect, and faintly to suggest, that they might be spending too much. René reassured her, painstakingly proving that their current expenses did not exceed the sum the notary had declared to be their average income. When the bills came in, all these fallacies were upset, with no disadvantage to anybody, for René's computations were not even correct when he fancied they were.

"René," began Annette, almost timidly, one evening, "could *ma tante* let me have a new dress, do you think?"

"Two new dresses," he answered boisterously. She could not understand why he blushed.

"No, I don't want two at this moment, and we must not exhaust the old lady."

"Exhaust? Nonsense! Her health is all the better for a little bleeding."

"Well, I think I must have my dress," quietly responded Annette. He kissed her, and went out. She remained pensive, with her chin on her palm. When Hector dropped in presently she talked about various trifles before she said: "Hector, I want to ask you something: Does René play?"

"Of course," he answered; "everybody does."

"You know what I mean. Does he gamble?"

"Gamble? My dear cousin, what an ugly word! He certainly occasionally plays very high."

"Thank you," she said, "you are a good friend to us, Hector." And she held out her hand, which he kissed. He actually liked Annette, although my mother liked her.

When René came home, rather late, he found his wife sitting up for him in a white dressing gown. He looked hot; she looked worried. "I wish you wouldn't sit up," he said; "I've asked you before."

"René," she replied, "I've been thinking; I fear we spend too much money."

"Bothering again!" he cried sharply. "One would think you were as stingy as

grandpapa! Money, I tell you, was made to spend."

"You do not deny, then, that we spend a good deal?"

"I do not. Shall we eat less meat?"

"René, you are unjust. Admit"—she looked straight at him—"that *you* spend too much!"

"I do not. Do you grudge it me?"

Still she looked straight at him. "Yes and no," she answered. "How much did you lose at play to-night?"

"Annette!"

"You do not choose to answer?"

"Pooh! Yes! Why not? The money is as much mine as yours. Ten thousand francs."

"And yesterday?"

"Five. But I had a run of luck the night before."

"And won?"

"Two. Annette, you are insupportable."

She got up, came toward him, put her arms round his neck. "Promise me not to play any more!" she said pleadingly.

"I give you the promise. On one condition. You mustn't mind my breaking it."

She loosened her arm. "At least, you are *honest* than most men," she said a little bitterly.

"Annette, I will do anything you like for you. But look here; I must play. Everybody does. And, besides, what *do* you care? I hate a woman who is fond of money."

"Would you like a spendthrift better?" she asked.

"Yes, a thousand times yes." She dropped the subject, seeing he was not in a mood to talk sense.

But a few days later she took it up again when he, coming home long past midnight, found her still sitting up to receive him.

"Oh! look here—I can't have this," he cried.

"René, you have been losing again!"

He sat down by a table. "Yes," he said, and almost banged down his fist. "If there's anything a man hates, it is a nagging woman, Annette!"

She walked right to the other end of the room, and stood with her back to him. "You will lose everything," she said in a low voice.

"Well, and if I did? But I shan't. The luck will turn, and, besides, I'm not a gambler. But, if I did lose everything, there'd always be plenty left."

"Where?" she asked, turning quickly.

"The grandaunts are as old as the hills. They'll soon be a second inheritance, like grandpapa!"

"You want them to die—even supposing——"

"No, I don't. The Jews'd wait. Nonsense, Annette; you worry me into saying a lot of things I don't mean. *Do* leave me alone and go to bed."

She came toward him quickly, with sudden resolve.

"It is your unfairness disgusts me!" she cried. "Half the money is mine! Why should you spend it all on *your* amusements, pray?"

"What on earth do you mean?" he cried, utterly taken aback. "I never objected to anything."

"Oh! I dare say not. I should think not. My few dresses and necessities, you hardly could object to those! You can spend tens of thousand, René, at the gaming table, and you can come home and talk about women who love money, because I faintly protest. I thank you heartily. If you like gaming, I like jewels and dresses—oh! far finer jewels and dresses than I ever had yet! You prefer a spendthrift wife! You shall have her—as spendthrift, sir, spendthrift as you please! I do not object to your spending your money on yourself; I object to your spending mine! Half of it is mine, I tell you—mine! I like dresses, I repeat to you, and

jewels! Oh, believe me, I shall spend my half!"

"I never saw you like this before," he stuttered. "I can not imagine what has come to you!"

"What has come to me? The desire to enjoy while I can! Yes, I shall enjoy—immensely. There is plenty, you say, in *la tante* if we bleed her, and, afterward, there are the poor old problematical grandaunts! I hardly believe in the grandaunts."

He burst into a roar of laughter. An immense weight was lifted from his conscience. "What splendid times we shall have!" he cried. "*Vogue la galère!* Annette, I must go for a bottle of champagne!"

"We can have the champagne at luncheon," she said. "Let's go to bed now. It's past one o'clock." So the champagne was postponed for the nonce, and next morning Annette almost looked surprised when René came in to luncheon with a case containing a diamond necklace.

"You are right," he said; "you have far too few jewels." She was silent. "You like it, don't you?" he inquired, rather anxiously.

"I don't much care for the shape," she said slowly. "Where did you get it?"

"At Vêratry's, in the Rue de la Paix."

"You wouldn't mind my changing it?" she asked.

"Oh, no!" he said, piqued. But they went to the opera together, and during the next few days she bought a number of very handsome dresses at David's, and also she graciously allowed him to come with her and select various articles of jewelry. She bought heaps of things right and left. A madness seemed upon her. Nothing could be too costly for her taste in the way of trinkets. Even René, after the first week, drew back. "If my madness is play," he said, "yours is diamonds."

She turned upon him quite furiously. "You grudge me my half," she said. A day or two after that she came to him with a couple of enormous bills—a fortune in jewels, a fortune in gowns.

"'Tis impossible," he said, thunderstruck. "Even admitting the jewels, the dresses can't have cost so much as that!"

"What does a man know about the price of dresses? What do I know of the stakes at lansquenet? Tell me honestly—to my face—if you dare—have I spent upon these dresses a quarter of what you have spent at play?"

"Oh, bother! I didn't say I wasn't going to pay. We shall have to bleed *la tante!*"

They went and had a look at *la tante* to-

gether. She was very substantial outside, but inside she was wasting away. Yes, there were gaps in her inside.

"Give me the money in papers," said Annette, who still was not aware that a debenture for one thousand francs may not be worth that sum.

He refused. He had refused several times before to give her scrip, and she had to be content till he brought her the money.

"Give me my whole fortune at once," she had said one day. But that was the only time in all their married life that they seriously quarrelled. He thought she doubted his honour or something, and refused to speak to her for two days.

"What is mine is yours," he said, with tears in his eyes when they were making it up and embracing. "Buy diamonds, if you like, for every penny we possess, but don't talk as if you distrusted me, Annette."

Certainly a madness seemed upon her, especially after Hector, very much pressed, had confessed that René's losses, as early as last winter, had been far heavier than his wife could know. Whether the time the couple were having was as fully enjoyable as René had fancied, it would be hard to say. It was brilliant certainly, and much remarked on. "You can't want another diadem!" cried

René desperately. "Annette, you've no right to waste money as you do!"

She flashed out at him: "I thought that you liked a spendthrift wife!"

"So I do, but not to madness."

"I shall spend as much as I choose, René."

"Annette—think of our child."

After that they were both very silent; he, unable to bear his wretchedness, ran out of the house.

He came back at night, haggard. He said nothing about her waiting up for him. Together they entered his "study."

"Well," she said, "can you let me have the money, René? I fear I must have it to-morrow morning."

"How much is it?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"Seventy thousand francs. It's a very large sum—but—but—it's a beautiful thing."

He dragged himself across to the iron safe, opened it, cleaned out its contents, and carried the bundle to the table. There he began counting up their value. Presently he stopped with a groan.

"There isn't so much as seventy thousand francs here," he said. "You—you have had more than your share, Annette."

"More than my share? And, pray, how much did you lose to-night?"

"Not a halfpenny. I haven't touched a card for a fortnight. Ask Hector. I'm sick of it. It's ruined us. If I were ever so wealthy, I should never play again."

She stood looking at him, her eyes dilated, full of the impulse she was keeping back.

Suddenly he burst out: "The boy! The boy! Our boy!" And he covered his face with his hands.

"You accuse me?" she said.

"No; I accuse myself. The fault was mine. I began it."

Suddenly she knelt down beside him. "René," she said, "do not be angry with me. It was a madness: it is over."

"But the child is ruined," he said.

"Not ruined. Look here. I still possess this paper. The madness was yours, my husband. It is over. See, I have done my best."

With dazed eyes he gazed at the document she was spreading out before him. It was a deed in which Monsieur Vêratry pledged himself to take back, if required within two months, from Madame de Viroflay all the jewels she had purchased from him, at a discount of five per cent.

"Is it possible?" stammered René. "What does it mean?"

"I did not buy them at all," replied Annette, blushing. "It was a little conspiracy

of mine; you must forgive me. He lent them to me, so to speak, for two months, and I paid him a deposit of their full value and thirty per cent."

"You have become quite a woman of business," he said.

"And the dressmakers' bills," she continued quickly; "*they* represented four times the sum that was really spent on clothes. The rest was money lent at interest. All the big dressmakers do it."

"I know," he said; "how did you?"

"Somebody told me as a joke."

"But what did you want with all that money, Annette?"

"To give it back to you," she said, and laid her head upon his shoulder. "I wanted to get hold of it," she sobbed, "and I could think of no other way. I saw that you were spending all the money in—at the club, René, and I knew when you were ruined you would stop. It was no use my asking for a few thousand francs, so I ran up bills for immense sums, and you had to pay them. But the bills will only cost you a percentage, René; you can have the money back."

He sat staring moodily in front of him. She tried to turn his head, wistfully seeking his eyes.

"'Tis my fault," he said. "I have deserved it."

"Don't speak like that, René. René, I don't think I should have done it, but for the child."

"Nay, the fault is mine; I admit it. You *could* not trust me."

"I trust you so much that, the moment the madness is over, I bring you all the money back again. Take it, René—take all that is left"—she pushed the paper into his hands. "What prevents your going back to the club?"

Then he turned round and caught her in his arms, and kissed her again and again. "We will take what is left," he said—"God forgive me, it is your share only!—and take it back to the notary to keep for us, while we live in the old house at home!"

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